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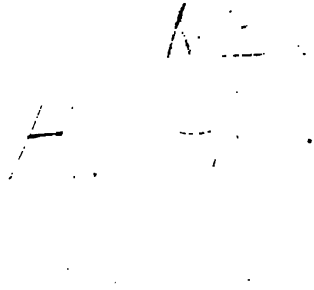
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A FOOL OF NATURE

JULIAN HAWTHORNE









A FOOL OF NATURE

BY

JULIAN HAWTHORNE

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
NEW YORK 1896

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A FOOL OF NATURE

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CHAPTER I

BEFORE DINNER

Murgatroyd Whiterduce is supposed to have come into this world on the 13th of November. One and twenty years later Pynchepole Whiterduce gave a dinner in honor of his heir. Some eighteen of the leaders of society sat down to table.

Despite the irreverence of progress, there is still something sacred about dinner. It is one of the few ceremonies of civilization to which reverence is still accorded. Why is this? Possibly the explanation might imperil the ceremony.

Its continued sway may be due to its symbolic character. Dinner is man's acknowledgment of his dependence upon his environment. It shows the microcosm assimilating the macrocosm. If he did not eat

his surroundings they would devour him. The personal soul derives its integrity from the impersonal element wherein it subsists. But I can ignore society only under penalty of being annihilated by it. This is the philosophy of dinner.

The Whiterduces had ever dwelt on the summit. Knock on the doors of early English history, and from within murmur echoes of Whiterduces. Their escutcheon has been stainless. Even at that remote epoch when they still retained arboreal habits, they were all gentlemen and ladies. Under the sway of monarchical ideas their virtue and ability had opened to them avenues to rank and power, but a refined pride had prompted them to hold aloof from the rewards of royal favor. The trappings of the courtier might obscure—they could never enhance—their serene but substantial dignity. They could brook no title less noble than that of Whiterduce. They stood aside, indifferent, while York and Lancaster shrieked and struggled. They neither helped nor hindered the First Charles in his vain career. Beside their serenity, how vulgar appeared the conflict of Court and Commons. The Whiterduces strove with none, for none were worth their

strife. Loyal to themselves, monarchs nor demagogues might intrude on their reserve.

Cromwell died without having made any impression on this family, and about the time when the Second Charles was boosted to his throne, they looked their last on England over the high poop of their westward faring bark. In America, an undistributed kingdom, they may have anticipated a sort of secluded sovereignty—not civil and religious liberty exactly, for had they not always owned themselves?—but freedom from creatures outwardly like themselves, but inwardly how alien and impossible.

The stern rigidity of Puritanism little incommoded them; they in their own fashion had always been Puritans. The austere cloak and frosty bearing sat easily on them. Without obviously deviating from the common path they held a way of their own. They acquired over their crude neighbors the irresistible because spiritual ascendency of attitude, silence, impartiality. But the offices of authority in the little community, often tendered, were as invariably declined, with a gentleness that veiled the scorn. What value had the Judges' Bench or the Governor's chair for those who must step

down to occupy them? They remained a race of gentlemen and ladies, pure and simple.

True, they must perforce submit to the common human necessity—they must take wives from the depths beneath them. But they did this frankly and uncomplainingly. She who became wife was translated; her life (so far as the Whiterduces recognized it) began at the moment she first crossed her husband's threshold. As for the children, only the elder son was regarded seriously. Second sons were rare in the Whiterduce genealogy, and they were never known to marry. The daughters might wed, if they chose; but in that case they spontaneously dropped out of sight, like objects fallen from a balloon. In any event, the first-born son held the most august position open to mortal ambition—he was heir of the Whiterduces! The day of his majority was not so much a festival as a sacrament.

Yet we must not regard this family from too esoteric a point of view. They were flesh and blood, and admitted as much. They did what others do—ate, slept, spoke, smiled, bowed (they did not shake hands). They trod the streets and laid their bodies

in the cemetery. They kept in the background the fact that inwardly they were nevertheless unique. They never dreamed of asserting themselves—of "putting folks in their places." Virtue that needs protection is no virtue; exclusiveness that fears ordinary contacts is fragility.

No—but to be intimate with a Whiterduce that, if you inquired into the matter, was an unknown experience. None indeed could be more graciously accessible than they; they were hospitable, affable, encouraging, even. They used not the stony stare of vulgar exclusiveness. You detected no condescension in their steady tones; you were welcome to their house and conversation. All there was serene, orderly and, apparently, unconcealed; no oubliettes nor cupboarded skeletons. A simple, cultivated, respectable, self-respecting American family. Yet the eye of a very Vidocq would fail to find that nameless thing that makes human intimacy. Upon this polished surface the feet of a fly would slip. Your visit over, whether it had endured twenty minutes or as many years, your departure, you felt, would leave no trace. There was nothing to find fault with; you could find nothing to

ask for that had not been spontaneously accorded you already.

We might speculate as to whether any Whiterduce had ever been familiar with himself or with the members of his own family circle. Nay, what might be their attitude toward their Creator? Respectful congratulation, was it? A fair earth, a sublime universe had He made—and an occupant thereof worthy of them and of Him! Moreover, since a long time had passed since the forming of the original Whiterduce, and the race had constantly improved, by this epoch they must needs have reached a point perhaps very little lower than . . . In short, after the Divine Initiative had done its best, the Product had taken its own development in hand, and to-day—behold! So we may think of the prayers of a Whiterduce as having the character of friendly consultations, and his religious worship as the manifestation of a sincere regard, remotely modified by a reminiscence of indebtedness. But intimacy . . . ? Let us drop the speculation.

Each age has its spirit, which the Whiterduces reflected. We are at this moment democratic and spiritual: and the Whiterduces of to-day are, accordingly, more suave-

ly friendly, more exquisitely intangible than heretofore. Having passed honorably but undemonstratively through the era of the civil war, they found themselves in an atmosphere of peace, prosperity, invention, refinements, and of capital versus labor. Now, wealth a Whiterduce must always have, as the sun brightness; the wave of civilization, sweep it never so fast, must ever bear them on its crest. Only the more considerate and indulgent were they toward the world. The present head of the house, Pynchepole Whiterduce, appeared a model of the wise, charitable, kindly millionnaire, whose family traditions forbade him the State House or the White House, but did not prevent him from according counsel intelligently sought. His was a mind which looked beyond immediate conditions to future contingencies, and could indicate the course of final expediency. Though his family scruples withheld him from the directorship of the great industrial enterprises of the nation, yet he was willing to enlighten public judgment, at need, by the investment of a loose million here or there. As for the dispute between capital and labor, he smiled at it.

"They are fighting phantoms," he said;

"neither really wants what it imagines. The worst luck either could meet with would be to gain its end. The true desideratum is . . ."

Political economy has no place in this story. And, if Pynchepole Whiterduce knew what the desideratum is, that is enough; we may safely trust the consequences to him.

The Whiterduce way of life was neither ascetic nor voluptuous. Cool and unpretending it was, and elegant it could not but be. On the other hand, we are not to fancy it oppressively formal. The Whiterduces grudged not the manifestation of social charm; an entertainment at their house rendered other entertainments vulgar; the atmosphere was rare, perhaps, but it would not do to call it uncongenial. Your host was careful to veil your inferiority with the subtlest tact—to make it wear the lineaments of a personal attraction.

The following query was once propounded at the St. Quentin Club: "What would Pynchepole Whiterduce do were a guest to put his feet on the dining-table?"

"What a soap-bubble does when you put your finger through it," said old Roger Hemynge, the lawyer.

"The feet would wither away," said Stukely Poyntell, the literary critic.

"Whiterduce would smile his kindliest and say, 'The best service one can do to culture is to emancipate it from prejudice,'" was the reply of the novelist, Verinder Vyse.

The club applauded the latter solution; but, after all, it was only Verinder Vyse's opinion. Pynchepole Whiterduce himself would probably have handled the problem differently, and if differently, then better. Verinder, as Aubert Frewin, the artist, remarked, was a wit, but Pynchepole was a Whiterduce.

Once in each generation society held its breath; a bride was being chosen for the Whiterduce heir. Aubert Frewin said it reminded him of the Aztec custom of selecting a maiden for the service of the god; she was treated like a divinity during the period of probation, but at the end of it was laid upon the altar, the priest cut out her heart and she was burned.

"The intended of a Whiterduce," objected Stukely Poyntell, "can have no heart, and must be too cold to burn."

General Stepyngstone knocked the ash

from his cigar with his ring finger. "As a description of the present Mrs. Whiterduce, Poyntell," he remarked, "that seems to lack your usual felicity."

Mrs. Whiterduce, in fact, had been a belle in her day, was still handsome, was understood to be a model wife and mother and tireless in charities.

"I remember her as Arabella Murgatroyd," said Judge Hemynge, from the other side of the fireplace. "Damned fine girl; more than one young fellow after her in those days — eh, Stepyngstone?" and there was a sharp twinkle under his bushy brows.

The General lifted his chin, and changed his pose from one long leg to the other. "Yes? Dare say," was his only rejoinder.

To them at this juncture enter the Rev. Christopher Plukerose Agabag, pastor of the Church of St. Sacrosanct. The members of the St. Quentin Club were drawn from all elements of society, only they must be unexceptionable in breeding.

The old Judge eyed the divine critically, as representative of a constituency outside of his jurisdiction. "Well, parson," quoth he, "how is Heaven getting on?"

The reverend gentleman smiled, drawing off his gloves, with elbows squared and elevated, his smooth-shaven comely countenance dimpling rosily on cheeks and chin.

"Too fast, I fear, for some of us," he said. "Why? Are your desires thitherward?"

"It's a winter resort the Judge is heading for," observed Verinder Vyse.

"Sh-sh!" whispered the man of God, gathering up his pendant black coat-tails and sinking gently into an easy-chair.

"The Kingdom of Heaven is within you," muttered Frewin, chewing his beard abstractedly, communing with himself.

"Only when your digestion is in order, my boy," sighed Vyse.

"Gentlemen, permit me to change the subject," said Agabag. "I have just come from the Whiterduces."

"From Heaven's antechamber!" said Vyse.

"I bear news," the clergyman continued. "Murgatroyd is to marry Isabella Sharingbourne."

General Stepyngstone turned his back upon the company and thoughtfully drove his boot heel into a log upon the hearth. Then he turned again.

"Touch the bell, will you, Hemynge?" he said.

The Judge applied the end of his square middle finger to the ivory button in the wainscot. There was a moment of silence before Stukely Poyntell said,

"Then we're safe for another thirty years!"

"With your leave, gentlemen," said the General, as the waiter appeared, "I'll order a bottle of wine. We'll drink the health of the young couple."

"I shall join in that toast with pleasure," observed Agabag, arching his white fingers beneath his chin. "Miss Sharingbourne is a charming young lady. Murgatroyd is——"

Here Aubert Frewin emerged for a moment from his habitual abstraction. Said he, "Do you know, Murgatroyd never impressed me as being a genuine Whiterduce; I've always felt there was something—I don't know—human about him."

Vyse's laugh had a touch of envy in it. "If you were ever awake, Aubert," he said, "you might get the credit of the good things you say."

"If he were awake he'd never say them," said Poyntell.

"Murgatroyd has the making of a man in him," the General declared.

"But not of a Whiterduce; I agree with Frewin," quoth the Judge.

"Now, I protest!" exclaimed Agabag in his rich voice. "Pynchepole Whiterduce is a man of men—an honor to the city and to the nation. It may be he shows the world too exclusively his intellectual and æsthetic side; but, trust me, such qualities have their base in a nature profoundly human. The powers of most of us are dissipated in superficial, even sensual pursuits; but Whiterduce husbands and concentrates."

Just there a silver salver with a glass of champagne on it came into gentle contact with his left shoulder, and the servant murmured, "Beg pardon, sir!" The clergyman's eyes dismissed their gazing, pulpit expression, and sparkled pleasurably. "Ah —yes—yes—thanks!" came from him in dovelike cooings. He took the glass daintily by the stem, and held it deftly at a seemly distance from his blooming visage, while the waiter completed his rounds, finally emptying the bottle into the General's glass.

The latter then met the converging glances of all, nodding slightly, and said,

"Gentlemen, here's to our worthy young friend, and the excellent young lady who—er—of his choice!"

They drank.

The General then wiped his gray mustache with his silk handkerchief, saluted the company gravely, and stepped out of the room, snugly buttoning up his black Prince Albert, and communicating a rhythmic swing to his long, military legs.

"Well, I don't mind the wine," remarked Vyse, thoughtfully, "but I'm sure I see the necessity of our celebrating that young animal's——"

Pontell gave a well-bred groan. "Oh, he'll have a million," he said. "I hardly can say I know the creature; I've seen him; he does look like a reversion to a more human type. Is it true they couldn't get him through college? Well, Miss Sharingbourne took a double first, didn't she, to make up for it?"

"The gray mare will make the running in his case," assented Vyse. "By the way, why does the General take so prominent a part in the congratulatory ceremonies?

Does he come in for a commission on the deal?"

"The commission, if there was one, was paid long ago," put in old Hemynge, with his saturnine grin. He added, "Ask the parson; he's the father confessor."

The Rev. Plukerose Agabag, whose meditations had apparently been transporting him to the thymey walks of Paradise, was thus recalled to himself and the world. He rose, with an elastic movement of his fine, full, well-proportioned figure, and smiled benevolently. He said he had some visits to pay before dinner. "I suppose we shall all meet to-morrow at our friend's birthday celebration?" he added, as he smilingly withdrew.

"He'd make a portrait," said Frewin, presently.

"Paint him as the Aztec priest with his hand on the young girl's heart; he'd pose for that," said Hemynge.

"Which young girl?" demanded Vyse.

"Paint her from a composite photograph," returned the incorrigible Judge.

"You're a bad old man," said Vyse, twisting his long, red mustaches. "Unless you reform I won't associate with you any

more, and posterity will consign you to oblivion."

"Will it? Then you must have put me into your forthcoming novel," retorted the eminent jurist, whereupon, in graceful acknowledgment of his discomfiture, the novelist pressed the magic button and bade the attendent genie take the gentlemen's orders.

CHAPTER II

THEY ASSEMBLE

The persiflage and breadth of phrase obtaining in clubs is discarded at a private dinner, at least when ladies are present. The price which ladies must pay to see us as we are is to marry us. Perhaps even then we hide from them what is most characteristic. But, on the other hand, do we not hide what is best in us from one another? And is not the highest self the true man? It depends on the man; probably alternation is wholesome.

The gentleman at whom we have already glanced attended the dinner the next evening, in conventional uniform; and in addition there were Blackmore Risdon, the editor of the *Constitution* newspaper, and Devereux Scaramanga, the Wagnerian. These, with Pynchepole and Murgatroyd, brought the number of males to ten. To balance the black shoulders there were nine pairs of white ones. The table was round.

Mrs. Whiterduce sat opposite her lord. At his right was Mrs. Dorothy Tiptoft, that wonderful old lady, whose humor and vivacity had been enriched rather than tamed by seventy years of social experience; who looked like a cross between an English duchess and a fairy godmother; who had known everybody knowable of the last two or three generations, and who was an inexhaustible mine of racy anecdote and good-humored but remorseless satire. At Mr. Whiterduce's left hand rose the imposing figure of Mrs. Sharingbourne, mother of the Isabella whose lofty destiny has already been disclosed to the reader. Mrs. Sharingbourne was like a Rembrandt portrait—massive, richly tinted, aristocratic of feature, with an imperturbable but graciously dignified demeanor. Mrs. Whiterduce was supported, right and left, by Blackmore Risdon and by General Stepyngstone, respectively; the former a Websterian personage, broad-shouldered, imposing, but markedly gallant toward women, and with a quizzical tilt of eyebrow and a sagacious twitch of the corners of his straight-lipped mouth, which showed that he knew how to appeal to the male sense of humor.

The Rev. Christopher Plukerose Agabag bloomed like a rose between Mrs. Jellicoe and Miss Aurelia Estengrewe. . Mrs. Jellicoe was a plump, elderly innocent, with puffy pink cheeks and an air of attaching herself to her interlocutor — of hanging trustfully about that favored person's neck. Aurelia was the eldest of three sisters, all present to-night, nieces of Mrs. Jellicoe ; each maiden had her line ; and Aurelia, a slender, rather sombre brunette, was addicted to esoteric religion ; so that it was esoteric, the sect was of minor importance. Hannah, next in age, was separated from Aurelia by Verinder Vyse ; her tastes were housewifely and domestic, and she had the flaxen hair and firm, ruddy flesh of a Gretchen. The youngest, Sabina, cultivated music ; she was petite and pretty, with brown, wavy hair and a fun-loving nose. She chirped under the long, lean wing of General Stepyngstone. Devereux Scaramanga was on her other hand ; he had independence enough to let his black locks flow down nearly to his shoulders.

It is an error to suppose that all men who do this are fools ; there have been instances much to the contrary. Sacramanga

also wore an aspect of sallow and deep-eyed romanticism.

Roger Hemynge and Aubert Frewin were attendant upon Mrs. Stepyngstone, a lean, much bejewelled lady, dowered with the happy faculty of cordial agreement with everybody and everything. Finally, Isabella Sharingbourne sat between Stukely Poyntell and her betrothed, Murgatroyd.

A handsome girl was Isabella, erect and correct, in fine physical condition, with clear, deliberate eyes, and straight, rather severe features. Both her mind and her body had been systematically cultivated up to their highest point of efficiency. She was but twenty years old, but she was ripe for marriage, for society, for a profession, for anything. No illusions imperilled her, nor sentiment enfeebled. "That is a girl," General Stepyngstone had once said, "who never will be guilty of a social mistake," to which Verinder Vyse had rejoined that apart from social mistakes no woman could attract or interest, instancing Helen of Troy, Sappho, Semiramis, Cleopatra, Heloise, Marie Antoinette, George Sand, and others of even later date. But he added that Miss Sharing-

bourne was still young, and that he was resolved to be hopeful of her.

Such were the component parts of the human instrument which Mr. Whiterduce had put together from which he must elicit an evening's harmony. Yet a word must be said about the Whiterduce trinity themselves.

The lady must have been upward of forty years of age, but except for her lack of movement and variety would still have been beautiful. Her repose was not that of a Greek statue, with which her form and features might have been compared, for the Greek is latent activity so poised as to be unchanging, though forever potent of change. Mrs. Whiterduce's immobility had the character of spiritual paralysis. She was destitute of initiative; she stirred only in response to external stimulus. Those who remembered her as a high-spirited, warm-blooded girl were at a loss to account for the change. Her soul seemed held in bondage by an impregnable force, as bodies are by ice or amber.

Of course, we are not to imagine Mrs. Whiterduce as literally incapable of motion; but it is difficult to explain how the effect of

abnormal stillness was produced. Was it the intent, yet unseeing look in her eyes? or the hush in her voice, as of one who speaks in the presence of an amazing spectacle, or under the influence of a ghastly foreboding? After conversing with her a few minutes, one instinctively lowered the tone of one's voice, as with a vague expectation of some strange event about to happen. Nothing ever did happen, and Mrs. Whiterduce always performed with perfect good breeding every requisite social function. She was probably the victim of some obscure affection of the nerves; her older acquaintances traced back her condition to the epoch of Murgatroyd's appearance. Yet Mrs. Whiterduce was not what is colloquially termed nervous, and her general health was equable. Aubert Frewin, who was occasionally visited by insights, expressed the impression she had on him by saying, "Other people's bodies die; it's the soul is dead in her."

As for Pynchepole, it was those who had longest known him who were most ready to admit that they knew him not. Was there, then, anything dark or sinister in his nature? Chemistry assures us that the diamond is derived from the blackest of sub-

stances, so thoroughly digested as to show only purity and clear reflections. Whiterduce seemed transparent, yet he could not be seen through. An investigator might fancy he had penetrated him, only to find that he was in an interior corridor, which left him as much outside the real reserves as ever. After your shrewdest inquisition, there still stood the quiet, friendly gentleman, with clear eyes and invisible manners, within reach of your arm, yet remote as the peak of Everest. His voice was low, clear and nicely modulated, yet his phrases had a careless spontaneity—a freedom from ultra precision — which in another might have been criticised. Physically he was neither tall nor short, stout nor slender; his close side-whiskers and clean-shaven mouth and chin imparted an English character to his delicately tinted countenance.

After all, the practical puzzle about him was that his undoubtedly great forces should be so divorced from great action. He had inevitably gravitated to the social, political, and industrial centre of the community, and the chosen men of mark and mind consulted with and deferred to him; the reins of influence were gathered ready to his hand, yet

his fingers never closed upon them. How can a man who has all his life been in the illuminated midst of civilization, visible and accessible by all, remain a mystery? Aurelia Estengrewe suggested that he had received the freedom of the Fourth Dimension. He was not a club man nor a diner out, nor a man of business, politician, traveller, author, inventor. His tastes were domestic and static. He sat on Sundays under Agabag. There are plenty of hustlers, shouters, and of brainless drones in the world; does he not also serve who is content to remain a model of serene and intelligent passivity?

Perhaps Murgatroyd was his father's least comprehensible manifestation. He appeared commonplace. The animal was prominent in him. It glowed in his cheeks, thickened his lips, lowered his forehead. His eyebrows were thick and all but met across the root of his blunt nose; his dark-brown hair was over-abundant and rebellious to the comb. He was as redolent of good humor as a gambolling retriever; grins and laughter bubbled from him at the slightest provocation. But he was afflicted with bashfulness, which was forever reddening his face

and ears, and blundering into his hands and feet. He was obviously well disposed, liking to be liked and to satisfy expectation, but the primitive impulse within was so alien to the sage outward admonition that it obeyed with difficulty, and the constant sense of failure rushed in, dismally tumultuous. Murgatroyd had moments of despair, contrasting what he was with what he ought to be. These alternated with seasons of oblivious, illicit joy—festivals of physical health and strength and delighted marriage of desire with gratification. Few youths had more than he enjoyed college life—so long as it was a matter of playing ball, rowing, eating, and genial carousing—but his inability to keep to strict training spoilt his value in college athletics, and as for study, neither under the academic shades nor during enforced retirement to rural solitudes tempered by learned parsons, could he bring his mind to it. The consequence was the indefinite postponement of his diploma.

On his way home Murgatroyd contemplated suicide, but he decided to eat once more first, and presently he found himself entering the paternal mansion.

Mr. Whiterduce happened to intercept

him on the way to the larder, where he knew that his friend, Sallie Wintle, the housemaid, would give him all the cold pie and cheese he wanted.

Mr. Whiterduce pleasantly beckoned him into the library, where the unhappy youth confronted him, his interior parts distilling to a jelly, while his skin was as though bathed in nettles. He heard the sound of that low, serene voice, which always slid through him like Saladin's cimeter, but for a while had no idea what it was saying. At length these surprising words reached his consciousness:

"Don't let it bother you, my boy. A college diploma amounts to nothing. Let the past go. You are a man now, and what I want you to do is to marry. You will like Isabella Sharingbourne, I think. You shall have opportunities of arranging it between yourselves. Have you had your lunch? Ring the bell and tell Foster to bring whatever you want. You are to give what orders you like in this house from this time on."

Semi-articulate noises strove to emerge from Murgatroyd's throat; Mr. Whiterduce smiled again, and left him to his own devices.

Some five months were still to elapse before Murgatroid would be twenty-one. During this interval ample opportunities were afforded to come to the point with Miss Sharingbourne. The youth used to go and sit in her presence, picking at the callosities on the palms of his hands while she talked, if she were so disposed, or sewed or read, as it happened. At first Murgatroyd was much distressed because he thought that some manifestation would be expected of him; but Isabella never betrayed any solicitude on the subject of his sentiments. She "minded" him no more than she did her collie dog; she fed him even oftener, and never caressed him. Murgatroyd was inarticulately grateful for this treatment, and began to think that if marriage involved no more trouble than courting, perhaps he might make a husband after all. At all events he was resolved to do his best, to make up for losing that diploma. He considered that his father had shown him enormous generosity. He did not take to Isabella nearly so much as to Sallie Wintle; but never mind! One day, after an abundant lunch, while Isabella was pouring out for him an extra cup of coffee, he said:

"I say, Isabella, how do you do when you get married? What does one have to do?"

Isabella looked up, with a piece of sugar between the sugar tongs. "Two lumps, don't you? Oh! When Mr. Agabag says 'Will you?' you say, 'I will,' and put the ring on her finger."

"Is that all?" exclaimed Murgatroyd, receiving the cup. "Why, that's easy. I can do that. Any fellow could."

"Yes, you can, if you care to."

"Well, let's do it. I mean I will if you will."

"Very well," said Isabella, after a little silence. She looked aside, out of the window, at the gray November sky. She looked back at her lover, swallowing his coffee. She pushed the silver basket of cake toward him and rose.

"Have you got everything you want?" she asked him.

"Me? Oh, yes; thank you!"

"I have an engagement. Will you excuse me?" She went out, and it was thus that Murgatroyd Whiterduce won his bride.

Dinner is served. The damask tablecloth is lustrous in the soft light. The flowers are

massed in the centre of the round table, glowing with color and breathing perfume. There is a sparkle of silver, crystal and porcelain. The subdued cheerfulness of conversation begins to murmur and undulate. Deft servants exchange noiseless signals and step hither and thither. Dinner has begun. There is not a fool present, or not more than one.

CHAPTER III

DINNER

The advantage of a round table is that the head of it is always where the best thing is being said. Anyone who can prove a right to it may occupy the position, without the pain of changing chairs. The host is on the same footing with his guests.

"Which do you prefer, Little Necks or Blue Points?" inquired Hannah Estengrewe, as she squeezed a segment of lemon over one of the first-named bivalves.

"Whichever I'm most accustomed to," was Verinder Vyse's reply.

"Now, I should have thought you would like novelty."

"Not on the lower, at the expense of the higher plane. Novelty in dinners may be a gastronomic virtue, but it is a moral error."

"Do explain, Mr. Vyse. Can Little Necks be immoral?" said Mrs. Sharing-

bourne, smiling over-graciously from Hannah's right.

"Mrs. Sharingbourne, eating is in the last analysis an animal necessity. The degree in which we disguise that fact is the mark of our advance toward civilization. The most civilized dinner is that at which you know not what you eat—thereby liberating your intellect for conversation."

"Ah, that accounts for it, then," said the old lady, with the most innocent air in the world. "It is the dinner's not being civilized. I always thought it was something else!"

"You mustn't mind him, ma'am," chuckled old Roger Hemynge. "He's trying sentences out of his next novel on us."

Mr. Whiterduce gave the discomfited novelist a friendly nod. "It's the right social principle—the spirit against the flesh," he said. "The ox and the ass are always trampling us if we give 'em a chance—eh, Agabag?"

"And the swine turn again and rend us," assented the clergyman, unctuously.

Mrs. Tiptoft sipped her hock and glanced across at the Judge. "You and I were brought up in a farm-yard, Judge," she re-

marked, "and we cherish the memory of our first loves!"

"Ay, ay, Mrs. Tiptoft. I may say I never saw to the bottom of my own nature until I read that passage about the pigs running down the steep place. If we can't be men and women, let's be swine. It's the first alternative."

"What a pearl hath our little clam produced!" said Vyse to Hannah.

"A black pearl, then," said Aubert Frewin. "Imagination is divine; it finds the human being in the animal—not the other way—and society out of solitude."

"Anachronism before soup," muttered the Judge, sotto voce, to Mrs. Tiptoft; "should have kept it for the coffee."

But Aurelia Estengrewe had heard and kindled.

"Mr. Frewin does say such soulful things in his strange way," she confided to Mr. Agabag. "Is it not true that imagination involves religion? It divines the unseen and eternal!"

At the same moment Mrs. Jellicoe, on his other side, asked his opinion on another subject.

"Tell me," she said, anxiously studying

the empty shells on her plate through her eye-glasses, "do clams really have pearls? I never found one, and I've eaten so many!"

The man of God disposed first of the material doubt.

"No pearls in Little Necks," he said, sympathetically. Then he turned to Aurelia. "The Church, by anticipating the most transcendent surmises of imagination, relieves us of the responsibility of accepting imagination as our guide. Nor can imagination be deemed a trustworthy index of the moral."

"N-no; still, may not imagination be a sort of personal revelation—to the pure in heart, you know?"

"Beyond a certain point," struck in Scaramanga, tossing back his hair with a noble movement, "morality is pusillanimous. It is a temporary local substitute for spiritual perception. The child is carried whither his nurse thinks best; the man walks on his own feet where he will. Convention leads us until we are of a stature to think independently. After that, my wrong may be your right—no general rule binds." As he spoke his eyes glanced across the table and rested an instant on Isabella Sharingbourne, seated

nearly opposite, beside Murgatroyd. The color in her smooth, firm cheeks deepened slightly, but Scaramanga was the first to look away.

"A communist of my acquaintance," remarked Mr. Whiterduce pleasantly, "was annoyed by some unauthorized intruder, who argued that, since communism held all things in common, he might sit by the communist's fire. 'I admit your right to sit there,' said my friend, 'as long as you don't interfere with my right to sit there alone.'"

Here the stately shoulders of Blackmore Risdon shook in a Jovian chuckle.

"That's the point, my boy," he rumbled huskily, addressing, not Whiterduce, of course, but Scaramanga; "sauce for the goose, sauce for the gander. You have to keep your eyes on your example quite as much as on your rights. The non-conformist who isn't an outlaw must be a hypocrite. The majority rules!"

"Is it from the editor of the *Constitution* that I hear that venerable fallacy?" demanded General Stepyngstone, fresh from a playful skirmish with the sprightly Sabina, youngest and fairest of the Estengrewes. "Apart from the editorial page, my dear

Risdon, on how many fingers do you count the real majority in this republic?"

Hereupon the two fell into a semi-serious political talk, and Isabella, quiescent since Scaramanga's speech, now resumed her duty of harassing Murgatroyd. Harassing is, of course, not the proper word, only Murgatroyd was, for certain reasons, obviously uneasy.

In the first place, he was never comfortable in evening dress; his tails embarrassed him, and he feared to crease his shirt-front or mar its purity with a miscarriage of soup or salad-dressing. To-night he was additionally depressed by the consciousness that the dinner was given in his honor (dismal irony!); and that he was fain to pose as the joyous lover, triumphant from the conquest of the shy virgin beside him. Had he been merely ignorant of the duties and conduct incumbent on him he might have better acquitted himself; but the ideal demeanor was vaguely present to his mind, while he felt his personal resources impotent to compass it. The suffering to the sow's ear involved in the attempt to make a purse of it is not sufficiently considered. It was inconceivable that a Whiterduce should disgrace his ancestry;

yet Murgatroyd was never free from dread of this mortal sin. To be born awkward and stupid is bad enough, but that the awkwardness and stupidity should spring from a root of demigods was more than humiliating. In his earlier years he had hoped that "growing up" would cure everything; but now here he was, six feet high, broad-shouldered and stalwart, hair on his upper lip, and yet more wrong than ever! What had his father said about donkeys trampling on us? Murgatroyd felt like a donkey trampling on himself. He groaned in the act of driving his fork through an entrée on his plate.

All the while Isabella was talking to him with imperturbable charm.

"Of course, though, you know, music is quite by itself. We can account for other things, but not for that. Music reveals what language hides; it's a vision of some beautiful country from which we are exiles; it makes us long to return, but we can never get further than the vision. When I was a child I used to wonder if fairy stories were true; but music showed me they were not half the truth. Do you prèfer Wagner?"

Murgatroyd made an effort.

"I guess I never read it. I like that about

the ogre in Jack the Giant-Killer." He delivered this in his best manner.

Once more Isabella's eyes and Scaramanga's met. But this was but natural. Scaramanga was a musical genius; Isabella's technical music proficiency had been gained through his influence. He was not a professional, but he was a creator and a connoisseur, and the musical temperament, so often brainless, was in him allied with an acute and audacious intellect. It was natural that he and Isabella should sympathize on musical subjects better than she and her future husband could.

The conversation was now general round the table.

Old Mrs. Tiptoft was delighting her neighbors with humorous anecdotes and scandal, to the bass accompaniment of Judge Hemynge. Mrs. Stepyngstone was chanting an odd duet with Aubert Frewin, he singing the fantastical, whimsical air, while she supplied the admiring but more or less unintelligent chorus. Mrs. Whiterduce responded to the remarks addressed to her with gentle monosyllables and accordant smiles—if that may be called a smile in which the eyes play no part. She seldom looked at any one; if

she did, it was generally at Scaramanga. Verinder Vyse was making both Hannah and Aurelia laugh, though the latter was trying to put her soul into a serious conversation with Plukerose Agabag. The clergyman, between excursions of magnetic eloquence, sipped his wine complacently, and sustained with apostolic equanimity the invertebrate appeals of Mrs. Jellicoe. The sprightly Sabina, during the General's temporary diversion with Blackmore Risdon, turned her bright eyes toward Scaramanga, who answered her with a genial sweetness. The General and his interlocutor had got on the topic of secret societies.

"One can understand them in Europe," remarked the former, "when plain talk is gagged the cipher code is natural. But what is the pretext here?"

"Pretext!" boomed the helmsman of the *Constitution*. "What is a fish's pretext for swimming? In every thousand so many men will be predisposed to secret organization. They will put forward what pretext you please—that they're not allowed to wear petticoats; that there are but seven days in a week; anything! The point is, they want to be the wheel within the wheel—control

the whole machinery. It's latent in all of us; didn't we have secrets and play mysteries at school?"

Agabag lifted his head out of a warm bath of esotericism.

"Then you think it's only a sort of imaginative game?" said he, "that they are satisfied with oaths, passwords, and initiations —plots and preambles; but stop short of action?—in this country, I mean?"

"Oh, now and then some crank takes the mummery seriously, and drops a bomb somewhere," returned Risdon. "But they will never agree upon any concerted plan of action."

"I admit I disagree with you," said the General. "Setting aside Freemasonry—which I believe doesn't claim to be the advocate of any specific social or political reform——"

"Just a big charity organization—without much charity!" the editor put in.

"Well, leaving that out, what have you to say to the Carbonari, the Mafia, the Nihilists, the Molly Maguires, the Highbinders, the——"

"I say, set the cry against the wool, and see what you've got!"

"And yet the press——"

Risdon chuckled good-humoredly.

"Yes, I know! The newspapers make the most of it—why not? That serves two uses: First, it turns an honest penny for us newspaper men; secondly, it's an escape-pipe for the conspirators. What they crave is notoriety; so long as the press gives them that you may rest secure about dynamite."

"What's that? All a secret society wants is notoriety?" came from the Judge.

Risdon joined in the general smile, but stuck to his paradox.

Whiterduce said: "We may still believe that secret societies rule the world—a single such society, maybe. But it would need to be really secret. Its very existence must be unsuspected. Most of its active agents, even, must be unaware that there is any such thing. Perhaps full knowledge of it would be confined to one person only. Given a man of adequate ability, and he may control civilization, while appearing to his nearest friends a mere indolent trifler. He must be wise enough to apply his impulse in the line of natural forces and human tendencies—never against them. Each of his

tools would imagine himself to be acting in his own interest. From the imaginative point of view the idea has always struck me as attractive. Won't you work it up for us, Vyse?"

"I see; you want to make me one of the ignorant tools!" returned the novelist. "Under the delusion that I was inditing original fiction, I should be obeying the behests of a secret tribunal!"

"Well, they could help you get rid of an edition," said Poyntell, "and might even influence me, without my knowledge, to give you a favorable review."

"There's one thing no secret tribunal will ever have the power to do, though, and that is to make me read the book," observed the remorseless Judge.

"The great fascination of a secret organization should be that it should be everlasting, but if it depended on one man—as Mr. Whiterduce suggests — it must die with him."

This was Aubert Frewin's idea.

"The world is never without one first-rate man," replied Whiterduce. "And first-rate men always know each other. Of course, in treating the subject artistically,"

he added, smiling at Vyse, "the inheritance should go from father to son, through countless generations."

"How terribly fascinating!" murmured Aurelia, with a shudder in her voice. "Is there such a family, do you suppose? Fancy knowing such a man, without knowing, you know——"

The Judge cocked an eyebrow at her. "Fancy marrying him, my dear young lady!"

"A living death!" said someone, in a husky whisper.

Who had spoken? They all looked at one another. Singularly enough (owing to the general preoccupation wrought by the discussion) no one could tell. There was a moment's awkward pause.

"Shouldn't you say, Mrs. Whiterduce," asked Scaramanga then, turning his eyes on that lady's expressionless countenance, "that it's rather straining the theory of heredity to suppose an uninterrupted lineage of Julius Cæsars?"

"The fable of the phœnix warrants it," remarked Poyntell.

"He'd be able to select his wife scientifically, you know," said the General, "and

to train his successor from infancy. The resources of modern physiology and psychology can now unite in wedlock such individuals that—er——"

"In wedlock?" queried the Judge. "The more advanced students are saying that the very security and serenity of the married relation militate against the engendering of genius."

"Hemynge, I'm ashamed of you!" said Mrs. Tiptoft. "You've drunk too much wine. Anyone would know you were a bachelor!"

"What else could any man be whose youthful hopes you had blighted?" retorted the irrepressible jurist.

"After all, what surer test of human greatness could be required than the ability to make the proverbial silk purse?" asked Poyntell.

"It seems to me, if there's any sewing to be done it's better to let a woman do it; don't you think so, Mr. Agabag?" said Mrs. Jellicoe, plaintively.

"*À propos* de bottes," exclaimed Blackmore Risdon, swaying his big shoulders, "this is a coming-of-age party, I understand; are we not to hear any remarks suit-

ed to the occasion? How about proposing the toast of the evening, eh?"

"All you have to do is to get up and go ahead," said Hemynge.

"No, no! You would be saying to-morrow that I had my speech set up at the office before I came down here," rejoined the sagacious editor. "Come, Whiterduce!"

Mr. Whiterduce looked amused.

"I nominate General Stepyngstone," said he. "If anyone can do credit to the emergency he can."

"General Stepyngstone!" was murmured approvingly round the table. Murgatroyd, meanwhile, totally unconscious of what lay before him, went on cracking English walnuts with his strong teeth, and feeling an interior peace.

The gallant officer arose. He touched his gray mustache with his napkin, straightened his shoulders, lifted his pointed chin, and bestowed a genial, comprehensive glance upon the company. He cleared his throat. In the moment of silence ensuing a nut cracked portentously between Murgatroyd's jaws.

"Pshaw! It's rotten," muttered that preoccupied young gentleman, reproachfully.

Eloquence is a sensitive thing, and the General felt that his opening was spoiled. And since every rose postulates a bud, he was embarrassed also as to the body of his address. The peroration, too—how was that to come off without the due preliminaries? Thus it happened that one of the most practised after-dinner orators of the day was actually rattled by so trifling an incident as a mistake in a walnut. The General retreated, covering his retreat, however, with the skill of a veteran.

"Er—brevity, we know, my friends, is the soul of wit. But it can be something more—it can be the—er—dictate of genuine feeling. My knowledge—er—my friendship with our host and hostess goes back many years. I have seen our young friend Murgatroyd, in whose honor we are met to-night —(gentle applause)—I have seen him grow from a boy to a man. He is now putting away boyish things (here Murgatroyd, with the dawn of consternation in his face, shoved away his plate of nuts) and I contemplate, with sympathetic emotion, his entrance upon the stern realities of life. He looks forward, with the bright, unclouded anticipations of youth (Murgatroyd cast a desperate glance

round the table, his face ghastly pale, and shoved back his chair, thereby producing a harsh, scraping noise, which in a moment turned him crimson), and let us, in this genial hour, rather share his confidence than apply the sad wisdom of experience—in short, my friends, it is my pleasure to give you the health and prosperity of Murgatroyd Whiterduce. May he live to be an honor to his ancestry, as he has ever been the pride of his parents and the—er—favorite of all who know him!"

Amid cheers and feminine hand-clappings all the guests rose to their feet, with rustle and bustle, and drank the toast standing, and "Murgatroyd, Murgatroyd!" went from lip to lip. The General felt that his remarks had not been just the thing, but he was uncommonly glad they were over. And he shared the general curiosity as to the heir's reply.

Murgatroyd, in his panic, had stood up with the rest, and emptied his glass without enough sense left to know whether he were drinking champagne or salad oil. Then the recognition that he had drunk his own health took all the remaining starch out of him, and he came down on his chair with a thump

that shook the room. He was now expected to get upon his legs and return thanks in a few well-chosen but heartfelt words.

"Murgatroyd, Murgatroyd!"

"Speech, speech!"

His dizzily swimming eyes, to which the ring of faces seemed a misty whirlpool, suddenly felt the impact, as it were, of a steady, rather severe regard, and he realized that he was confronting the gaze of Isabella Sharingbourne.

It gave him a sensation, not agreeable, but in the nature of a stimulus. It gave him to understand that her credit was involved with his own. Finally, it awakened in him, if but temporarily, a certain perception, inevitable soon or late to all of us, which is one of the forlorn experiences of mortal existence.

For Murgatroyd, up to this moment misled by his own warm and trustful heart, had imagined that his fellow-creatures cared for him. However open he might be to criticism, he had supposed that at bottom everybody meant well toward him. If his friends found fault with him, it was only to the end of making him better and happier.

But now, when he felt, as never in his life

before, need of the sympathetic support and love of those around him—in this crisis of direst distress—he saw that the very persons who were pretending to do him honor, from whom he might rightly expect the gentlest consideration, in reality despised and ridiculed him, and cared for him not one jot. In the midst of the lights, the luxury, the compliments, the cries of encouragement, he saw with a flash of relentless insight that he stood alone, the object of thinly veiled contempt and aversion. There was no one to whom he could look for countenance; to the girl who was to be his wife, the most intimate guest of his heart and soul—to Isabella —least of all.

All this, welded together and pointed by that glance from Isabella, pierced him like a sword. The pain took away his bashfulness. It was too poignant even for tears.

He stood up, slowly and heavily, and faced them all.

"I guess I oughtn't to be here," he said. "I'm no use to you except to laugh at. I don't feel as if I belonged here. It seems queer I should have been born the way I am. I'm not like any of you. I've tried to be, but I don't think I really want to be. I

know you're better than me, but still I— well, I guess you don't care to hear this— I guess I'd better— Excuse me, please; good-night ! ''

Such was Murgatroyd's birthday speech to the guests who had come to celebrate his majority. There was not the faintest trace of animosity in his tone, or even of grievance. It was simply a painfully guileless blurting out of what he believed were facts. It was unpardonable, atrocious ; but it is safe to say that Murgatroyd's speech produced a stronger effect than he had any idea of or than anyone present anticipated. As he spoke the last words he pushed back his chair and went awkwardly toward the door. No one spoke or stirred except Mr. Whiterduce, who got up and opened the door for the young man and laid his hand on his shoulder as he went out, and said kindly, " Good-night, my boy ! ''

CHAPTER IV

THE HOBBY HORSE

In a narrow back street, within sound of the tramway-car bells on one of the chief thoroughfares of the city, yet as distant from it socially and ethically as if it were in another planet, stood a musty, dingy beer saloon known as the Hobby Horse.

It was a place even the existence of which was unknown to the kind of people we have hitherto been associated with. And yet it was by no means such an evil-minded and murderous dive as might be found in less unpromising localities. You could get good beer there and meet people whose conversation had points of interest. The host kept order, and was also a philosopher. He was a cubical, pale-eyed German, five feet nine inches high, weighing 250 pounds. He was calm, courteous, resolute, and ordinarily serious, though sometimes, when only a few well-known customers remained, late at

night, he would come from behind the bar, sit at one of the tables, and talk with sagacity and humor.

He had a wife nearly as big as himself, ugly, shrewd, and good-humored, who occasionally helped her husband attend to the guests. The latter made her the object of sprightly compliments and badinage, which she returned full measure, like her schoppens of beer; but if anyone ventured too far in gallantry, she gave him reason to regret it promptly.

The landlord was called Heinrich and his wife Frau Pilsen. They had occupied the house a long time and did a good business. Herr Heinrich used to say, with quiet complacency, that the police had made no complaints against him since he had been there; and he would sometimes add that he would see to it that they never did. Any guest might express any opinions he chose, provided his language was neither indecent nor over-loud; but any attempt to do anything not in harmony with law and order was strictly (and effectively) forbidden.

This was good sense and good business. Many of sturdy Herr Heinrich's patrons had sat at his tables almost nightly for a dozen

years or more. Frivolous and rowdy people found the society uncongenial; there were men there, perhaps, who held and discussed theories or even designs of an extravagant or outrageous nature; but they paid for their beer and conducted themselves respectably while they were within the realm of Herr Heinrich. The most bloodthirsty anarchist, the most relentless nihilist who ever planned to decimate society for the sake of abstract human happiness, would have plunged through the door of the Hobby Horse head-foremost, with the toe-mark of Herr Heinrich's massive boot tingling in his rear, had he presumed to disregard the unwritten rules of that establishment. But so long as he was orderly in his demeanor, Herr Heinrich would not only extend hospitality and welcome to him, but would, if opportunity served, sit down with him and listen to plans and suggestions which would have turned any ordinary citizen's hair white. But the big beer-seller would only nod his head and smile, and say in his sleepy bass voice, "Gut—das is gut, mein lieber. Do vat you laik and dake der gonsequences—dat is der prieflege of all man. Der worlt is full of wrong dings; I will be glad myzelf

when dey are removt. But vatefer vill be done, es muss bier getrunken werden—nicht? Well, I shdays here and I sell beer, more als dwelf year now. When you sets dose wrongs righd, you gome here by me, and we drink; if you vail, you gome and we drink just da zame—ja? Na, also—noch eins? Ja, wohl!"

Men like this will survive and prosper when the bomb of social regeneration has swept all other life from the planet. They are mortised down to the hard pan of creation. The last relic left of human occupation of this globe will be a beer-keg. Perhaps it will form the nucleus of a new planetary system.

About midnight of the 13th of November two men were sitting with Heinrich at a table in the corner of the small back room at the Hobby Horse. This room was behind the bar. To get into it you must be admitted through the gate in the bar and then pass through a doorway in the rear partition. It was a sombre, ill-ventilated little closet of a room, but it was a compliment to be invited into it, and it was seldom crowded. Frau Pilsen sat on a stool within the bar, so that she could both attend to

business in the outer saloon and yet exchange a congenial look and word with the denizens of the interior shrine.

The two favored guests on this occasion were about the same age, but widely different in other respects.

One sat erect, with a straight back and a full chest; he wore a dark beard, close cropped, but his head was bald except at the sides and back. He had a bold, frank, keen face, with force and meaning in every feature. There was a pair of gold-rimmed eye-glasses on his rather full, penetrating dark eyes. There was a various play of expression over his countenance as he spoke or listened; his laugh was soft and pleasant, his smile full of quick and subtle comprehension. You felt in him a nature of immense strength, warmth, and fineness—a capacious, vigorous intellect, and an ardent heart. Learning to know him better, you would find him capable of savage satire, fierce independence, violent enmities. He was a tremendous friend, a terrible foe; he had more foes than friends. Both in love and hate he was blind and uncalculating, He was a physician, learned in theory and almost unrivalled in practice. He believed himself to be an atheist, and

laughed good-humoredly at all efforts to convert him, but would never argue the point. On the other hand, he was a devout believer in astrology, and was always ready to vindicate the truth of its principles and prognostications. He was a descendant of New England farmers, but had studied his profession in Germany and France, and had seen that singular phenomenon, the world, great and little, rich and poor, outside and in. With all his knowledge and experience the boy in him, in this his forty-fifth year, was rampant and inextinguishable. He was a tireless and fantastic joker, and had a strange love of puns—the worse they were the better he enjoyed them. He once concocted the following abominable quatrain, and delighted to repeat it, as if it were really an exquisite stroke of humor :

> If I were pun-i-shed
> For every pun I shed,
> I shouldn't have a puny shed
> To hide my punished head !

It is needless to say that a character of this quality was hardly adapted to be the pet of conventional society. His skill, amounting to genius, made him sought after

in dire emergencies by the "aristocracy" as urgently as by others; but he did not get on smoothly with them. His preposterous jokes, his headstrong independence, his utter irreverence toward all conventions, and his terrific sarcasms on all humbugs made him a storm centre in the higher social latitudes; and there is no denying that he generally had a chip on his shoulder when he went in that direction. His patrician patrons were in a quandary whether he or death were the more formidable. But when it came to the pinch, they were apt to resign themselves to the former. When he was in a practicable mood he could be the best company imaginable; only be careful not to awaken the barbarous prejudices of this man who held himself to be incapable of prejudice. If he loved you, indeed, you could say anything to him, and he would only laugh with contagious glee, and clap you affectionately on the back. But otherwise—beware! He was at one time a member of the St. Quentin Club, and, coming in on a certain memorable afternoon, saw Mr. Pynchepole Whiteruce sitting there, in the midst of a reverential group of the bluest blood in town. Now, he had a short time before attended

Mrs. Whiterduce in a dangerous and obstinate illness, and had brought her through it in the teeth of all the prophecies of the faculty. He walked up to Whiterduce, and brought down a heavy hand on his shoulder. "Well, old cock!" exclaimed he in a jovial, ringing voice, "when are you going to pay me that bill you owe me?"

No human being had ever before thus accosted a Whiterduce. Everyone within hearing turned pale or red, and shuddered. Mr. Whiterduce retained his self-possession and said quietly, "How much do I owe you, Dr. Maydwell?"

"Ten thousand dollars, old Stick-in-the Mud!" replied the Doctor, settling his eye-glasses on his nose, and chuckling in a peculiar manner. The two men looked at each other for a moment.

Whiterduce took out his check-book, and a fountain pen, and wrote a check for ten thousand dollars. He held it out to Maydwell with an air of polished contempt.

"There is your pay," said he. "Let me advise you, when you deal with gentlemen, to make your applications for money through the mails. It will compensate in a degree for the recklessness of your charges."

Such a rebuke, from such a source, would have crushed all but one man in a million. Maydwell was the exception, and Whiterduce had made the mistake of his life.

Maydwell, in truth, had long been resentful of a certain assumption of superiority in Whiterduce's demeanor, and had been spoiling for a fight. The publicity of the situation just suited his fell purpose.

He took the check out of Whiterduce's slender fingers and neatly tore it into four pieces, which he twisted up into a pellet, with a quaint grimace at the rapt circle of onlookers, as if to invite their appreciation of the most charming joke in the world.

"Pynchepole, my boy," said he, with a sort of subdued laugh in his tone, rolling the pellet between the palms of his powerful hands, "I know you up to the handle, but you haven't got on to my curves yet. You are the dirtiest old fraud in America. You sit here and mince and twiddle your thumbs, and there isn't a blackguard in town low enough to look up to you. I wouldn't use your soul to wipe my feet on, Pynchepole. You know I wouldn't, and you know why, and you daren't say a word. I can respect a thief who does his own stealing, and a thug

who does his own murders, and even a liar who tells his own lies; but you see, Pynche, you're not one of that sort. I don't want your money; I know where it comes from and where it goes to. Now, you're a pretty sick man, and I'm going to give you a prescription, and I shan't charge you anything for it."

He stepped forward, still laughing in that peculiar manner. Whiterduce tried to rise from his chair, but Maydwell forced him back. He seized his nose between his right thumb and forefinger, and as the other involuntarily opened his mouth to catch his breath, he crammed the ten-thousand-dollar pellet down his throat. It was a hideous, revolting spectacle, and those who witnessed it were stricken so aghast that not a man of them stirred. It was as if a spirit from the infernal regions had suddenly risen and dilated in the quiet and well-bred midst of them.

The next minute there was a general outcry, and half a dozen sprang to their feet; some gathered about Whiterduce; others made threatening demonstrations toward Maydwell. He stalked to the fireplace, set his back against the mantel, and stuck his

hands in his pockets. He called to one of the waiters, hovering in panic on the outskirts of the agitated throng, and ordered a sherry and bitters. "And mind, John—not too much bitters! You know how I take it."

Then he looked around at the hostile and bewildered faces, and smiled invitingly.

"Well, fellows," he said, "it will take John about five minutes to get that thing ready. Meantime, if any of you, or any number of you, want to say or do anything to me, or to call in a policeman to say or do it for you, now's your chance. Don't let Pynchepole dissuade you, if you feel that way. He has forgiven me already, because he's a Christian; but that needn't influence you. Come, now!"

There were men enough there who lacked neither courage nor strength; but they hesitated. The whole affair was unprecedented, incredible. It seemed as if some explanation must spontaneously appear. Would not Whiterduce say something? Or perhaps General Stepyngstone's suggestion gave the true clew: "The man is crazy—stark, staring mad—insane, sir!"

Before anything could be decided on, John came with the glass of sherry and bitters on

a silver tray. Maydwell took the glass and put a silver dollar in its place. "I shall want the glass as well as the sherry, John," he observed; "if there's any change you can keep it. Now then," he continued, "I drink to the whole damned, currish, snobbish pack of you. The whole infernal club boiled down together hasn't got soul enough to salt a cup of gruel. Here's to what I think of you!"

He emptied the contents of the glass into his mouth, then turned and spat it out into the fire; he lifted the glass and dashed it into splinters on the hearth. He settled his hat on his head and sauntered to the door, seeking defiantly to meet the eyes of one after another, but none cared to encounter him. When a man chooses to overstep a certain limit of behavior the majority of his fellows are solicitous only to keep out of his way. In the West there might have been some shooting, but here all that happened was an immediate special meeting of the directors of the club, and, a quarter of an hour later, the posting on the bulletin board of the notice of the expulsion from the St. Quentin Club of Horace Maydwell, M.D. Beyond dispute he richly deserved it, but neither was

there room to doubt that he had discounted the club's action. He had kicked them first. This event happened two or three years previous to our date. No solution of the mystery of the row had ever come to light. Whiterduce, out of regard for the reputation and privacy of the club, generously forbore to prosecute Maydwell for assault. Society self-sacrificingly inflicted the only punishment it could; regardless of its physical health, it sent him to Coventry. Nobody who was anybody ever again made application for his professional services. His income, from many thousands a year, dwindled to a mere maintenance. It was hoped that he would be driven from town, but he was not of that fibre. He was unaffectedly pleased with what he had done, and often went out of his way to stroll up the fashionable promenade of a Sunday afternoon for the gratification of grinning in the faces of his former aristocratic acquaintances. He was obliged to change his office to a less expensive quarter, but he was anything but repentant or repining. He devoted his unsurpassed talents to the poor and to the lower middle class, and was idolized by them. He had never cared for money except to give it

away or to spend it with friends; now that he had less to use in this way he gave them more of his time and skill—that was all the difference. He got no more $10,000 fees, but he felt richer and happier than ever, because he had freed his mind and unloaded his spleen. It was characteristic of him that, on the evening of the row, he called on one of his dearest friends, Gabriel Negus, an astrologer. Gabriel was an immense, placid, imperturbable creature, with a huge, smooth-shaven face, the complexion of a girl, and a slow, fateful, self-enjoying manner of speech.

"What were the indications for to-day, my old love?" asked Horace.

Gabriel opened a small, well-thumbed volume, containing to the profane understanding nothing but columns of figures and an array of queer, cramped characters. He turned over the leaves for a few moments, murmuring softly to himself, and then looked up with a slow, arch smile.

"Why, Horace, my dear, I guess you've been up to something to-day. Guess you've been—shaking out a reef—to-day, eh? Put your foot in it, up to the neck, to-day, Horace! Say, Horace, the planets sort of jumped on you this time, didn't they? But

I should say you jumped on somebody first pretty hard. Cost you a good deal, but you did it—yes—you did it! Looks a good deal like a general flare-up to me, eh! Any—bones—broken—or—windows—smashed?" He referred to the book once more. "Doesn't seem to be a hanging matter, quite. Loss of social standing — yes—and — money — stacks of it! Guess you must have been bucking the tiger, Horace, and when you found they'd done you—you kicked 'em—down—stairs!"

And the astrologer leaned back in his chair and shook gently with silent laughter.

Horace was fairly enchanted with this remarkable verification of his favorite hobby. He proceeded to unbosom himself. Gabriel listened to the tale with the humorous enjoyment of one who knows it has all been written in the constellations since the beginning of time, and that spilt milk is past crying for. "But, look here, my dear," he said, after turning it over in his mind for a while, "what started you after—Brother Pynchepole—at such a rate? Don't appear that he quite played up to you, from what you say? If he'd stolen your scalp while you was asleep, or poisoned your sister-in-

law's aunt with a cup o' tea, you couldn't have—gone for him—much worse than you did. There ain't really — anything — specially out of the way—about Brother Pynchepole—is there?"

"Now, don't you worry your dear old head about that," Horace replied. "I was with that wife of his when she didn't know her head from a hole in the ground, and when women are like that they will talk, though they don't remember it themselves afterward. I don't give away my patients —you know that; but if Pynchepole knew what she told me, he'd risk a noose for the sake of insuring its not going further. Then there's another thing. I was called in the other day to fix up a fellow who'd had a knife put into him down in a thieves' den they call the Pigstye. There's several good fellows, friends of ours, down there. They will stick each other now and then, and I'm always glad to pull them through if I can. This poor devil had to croak, though, and I told him so. Well, then he began to feel bad in his mind, the way some of those poor little damned fools will, and he blabbed some stuff that opened my eyes more than I expected. When he got through, he said:

'For Christ's sake, don't you go to cure me now, Doc; if they was to know I'd squeaked, they'd pull out my guts and fill me up with red-hot gravel!' I told him not to worry, but he wouldn't be easy except I stayed by him till he was out of harm's way. That made me look about a little afterward, and I found he'd given me a straight tip. You can leave me alone with Brother Pynche, every time. I wish you'd seen the way he looked this afternoon!' And Horace Maydwell smiled and settled his eye-glasses.

Gabriel contemplated him thoughtfully, sitting with his hands spread out on his knees like an Egyptian king. "Yes," he muttered — "yes — yes; the doctors hear funny things, don't they?—and so do I—so do I—so do I! I'm a doctor, but I don't cure — I only diagnose — only diagnose! Well, my dear, you'll have to run away now," he added, sitting up and sighing. "I've got the anteroom full of females, waiting to know what they were made for; and I've got to explain it to 'em before nine o'clock. Heigho!"

The two friends exchanged a prolonged and mighty grip—it was one of their mutual jokes to try to crush each other's finger-

joints—and bade each other an affectionate farewell.

This will suffice to introduce Dr. Horace Maydwell to the reader, but before going further it is but fair to present his companion.

Polydore Scamell—that was his name—was a teacher of singing. He was a dark-complexioned, straight-haired, weary-looking man, with a portentously long nose, a drooping mustache, and sombre, brooding eyes. His face was narrow and meagre, with deep furrows slanting from the nostrils to the corners of his mouth; his chin was heavy and square. His lean throat, with its prominent Adam's apple, and the outstanding veins on his long, knotty hands indicated a plentiful lack of flesh on his bones; though the bulky clothing he habitually wore—the massive overcoats and flapping trousers—seemed designed to avert this revelation. He was addicted to a preposterous hat, of the old-fashioned army pattern, but with a brim of exaggerated breadth; it matched his big overcoat well enough, but seemed to be kept from slipping down over his narrow visage only by the ears that stood out on either side. Upon the whole, he would have

served as an ideal model of Don Quixote, in the earlier years of that famous gentleman's existence, before the perusal of works of chivalry had finally tuned him up to the pitch of knight-errantry. Weariness, melancholy, and eccentricity were his ruling expression in repose.

No sooner did he engage in a conversation that interested him, however, than a transformation came over him. His dark eyes sparkled and laughed, and a sort of caressing courtesy shone out all over him, made additionally winning by a boyish gayety and *naïveté*. The deep, melodious tones of his voice (though his accent in speaking was a marked nasal drawl) carried out this charming impression; one recognized a man whom it was impossible not to like and trust. Here were a kind heart and a generous soul. There was an ingenuous comicality about him withal that rendered him irresistible.

Polydore had two special weaknesses. One was for women, of which be it only said that his success with that mysterious sex was fully equal to his enterprise; his numerous pupils in the vocal art were not attracted to him by the superiority of his "method"

alone. His second foible was concerned with this method itself. It was to him what all distressed damsels and heroic emprises were to him of La Mancha. Any allusion to it aroused his every energy, to argue, to advocate, to denounce, to combat, to pour forth the vials of wrath or the incense of praise, as the case might be. His method was natural, logical, perfect; all other methods were not merely imbecile, vicious, and suicidal, but all who taught them were thieves, liars, and assassins. There were not half a dozen singers living, or who had ever lived, who had the least notion how to produce a note correctly. The so-called great singers had attained their fame in spite of incredible mismanagement of the vocal organs; had they followed the method they would have been infinitely greater than they were, and would moreover have retained their powers unimpaired to the utmost limit of old age. This method was not the invention of Polydore himself; had it been so, he would not have cared nearly so much about it, nor been so fiercely resentful of any animadversions upon it. It was the discovery of a friend of his, a man now lost to earth, but doubtless eminent in that world where

singing is done as it should be. Polydore seems to have been the only pupil the inventor ever had; how much his appreciation of the discovery was influenced by his affection for his friend we need not inquire. At all events, when his friend died, unhonored and unsung, Polydore Scamell gave up his profession as eccentric actor, in which he was making a good living, to devote himself henceforth wholly to the vindication and inculcation of the method, and, incidentally, of his dead friend's virtues, genius, and neglect. And whoever wished to take the direct road to Polydore's inmost heart need do no more than profess his adherence to the method. With that to recommend him all faults were dazzled out of sight. Horace Maydwell, who really approved of the method on physiological grounds, was the nearest brother of his soul, ever ready to listen and sympathize; and in return Polydore was always prepared to celebrate the supreme value of a discovery of the doctor's—how to make hair grow on bald heads. Maydwell, before publishing his discovery to the world, was testing it upon his own bare poll, and had been doing so for ten years past, believing, and persuading Polydore to believe, that it

was producing a marvellous effect, albeit to the eye of love and faith alone was any effect discernible. There was no question (having in view the number of bald people, anxious for hair, in the world) that the invention, once it was launched on the market, would bring in millions of money, and the two friends often solaced themselves with discussions of how, when the physiological hair-grower and the natural singing method should be established in public favor, they would make each other, and all good persons, happy with the pecuniary returns. Gabriel Negus was admitted the third in their councils, filling the post of soothsayer and prophet in ordinary. Polydore was quite as ardent an astrologer as either of the others, and was unwearying in hunting out favorable dates and aspects. History mentions several triumvirates, but none so mutually well disposed, so free from internecine jealousies, and so fruitful of innocent felicity as was this.

Horace Maydwell and Polydore Scamell, then, sat with Heinrich on this night of November 13th in the little back room of the Hobby Horse and communed together. Each had a glass of beer before him, and

Polydore was smoking a cigar. Horace did not smoke, and, indeed, was a very light drinker also, though, out of regard for Heinrich, he would not omit to give his order.

"Twelve o'clock," said Polydore, taking a look at his heavy German-silver watch. "Time the boy was here."

"Give him rope," returned Horace; "he doesn't come of age every day."

"Prehaps," said Polydore, who had his own way of pronouncing certain words, "his rope'll tangle him up so he can't get here."

"That would be highly imp-rope-er," observed Horace, enunciating the atrocity with the most sedulous distinctness, and grinning shamelessly. Polydore, made callous by custom, simply gave a twist to his long nose, as at an unholy odor, and took a swallow of beer.

"Funny—he ain't any more like the old man than I am like a keg of oysters," he remarked, meditatively. "Knocks out the heredity racket, doesn't it?"

Horace turned up his chin and rubbed the short beard on his throat. "Heredity's all right; but you can't expect her to get out

two such pills as old Pynche in one generation."

"Used up all the poison on him, and had nothing left for the youngster but bread and milk—was that the way?"

"There's solider stuff than bread and milk in little Murgy," replied the other. "He's got a heart fills his body and most of his noddle, too, bless him! And fists and shoulders, plenty of 'em; he'll do."

"And money, a little," added Polydore, sending out two columns of smoke from his nostrils.

"He'd be better off without that."

"Well, there's one good thing about money, a fellow can get quit of it easy," Polydore observed, with a sigh. "Hullo, there's our business now! Come in here, Murgy; we're waiting for you!"

Murgatroyd, in evening dress, with his collar turned up and a distraught expression on his clumsy, guileless phiz, was standing outside the bar. Frau Pilsen leaned forward, unhitched the catch of the wicket and admitted him. He took a step or two in the direction of the table and stopped.

But Horace had jumped up, and met him with open arms.

"Why, the little pet!" cried he; "did it get here after all? And was it twenty-one years old? And didn't it forget its friends that loved it? Was it loaded up to the neck with nasty champagne and birthday cake? Never mind; it shall have some of Herr Heinrich's good beer, to take the taste away! Gentlemen, I present to you the best little boy in town. Frau Pilsen—Heinrich—Poly—catch hold of him, and give him a shake for luck! Twenty-one years old, and looks as young as ever!" All this was accompanied with jolly laughs, huggings, and solid thumps on the back and chest. Meantime, the others had gathered round. Frau Pilsen descended from her stool and waddled up, smiling horribly, volleying guttural good wishes. Polydore had a long arm around his neck, and was intoning, in the natural method, "Good for you, Murgy! Many happy returns! You're a sight for sore eyes, boy!" And cubical Herr Heinrich, who had been sitting with half-closed eyes, taking no further part in the conversation than to exchange a somnolent glance of intelligence with the others, and periodically to lower the beer level in his schoppen, now set himself on end and

grasped Murgatroyd's disengaged hand in his "Guter freund, I maig you my geburtstag gompliment; viel, viel vergnugen! 'Lischen, lass' e'mal fuenf glas bier holen! Gendlemen, all drink vat heute abend hier bestellt wird, geht ya auf meine rechnung—I bays all beers of dis dable to-naid, verstandten? Na, gut! Stosst an, meine Herren—Herrn Murger! Mahlzeit, Gesundheit, Prosit! Aus!"

Murgatroyd did not drink his own health this time, but the glasses of the others—Frau Pilsen's, too—met together with a hearty clink, and—Aus!—no heeltaps. Herr Heinrich absorbed his in four swallows; Polydore had to take fresh breath several times before he could get all his liquor down his lean neck; Frau Pilsen finished a trifle in advance of Polydore, and emerged, crimson and smiling, and daintily wiped her Gorgon lips with a very small and dirty, but lace-edged handkerchief. Horace Maydwell, however, approved himself the champion of this bout. Many a beer duel had he won in the old Munich and Berlin days, owing to a somewhat rare physiological faculty that he possessed. He tilted his head back, and keeping the entrance of his gullet open, emp-

tied the entire schoppen of beer down it without swallowing at all. One gulp, and all was gone! It was like magic. The feat was greeted with admiring applause, even from the mighty Heinrich. "Iv you vould drink zo ovton as you can maig it quick, mein lieber," he remarked, with a sleepy smile, "you vas been der largest doper was est gibt!"

"I'll do it every time Murgy is twenty-one," said Horace, adjusting his eye-glasses. "Sit down now, old Sweetness, and tell us all about it!" And they took their places around the table, all except Frau Pilsen, who had waddled back to her stool of office.

Murgatroyd sat for a few moments, staring straight before him, the corners of his mouth twitching. Was it the difference between this greeting and that which he had lately experienced at his own table that affected him? Nothing so melts the heart as the glow of lovingkindness following close upon the frigid phosphorescence of selfish convention. It was too much for Murgatroyd, whose soul had been searched as never before that evening. He suddenly dropped his head upon his arms on the table and burst out crying.

CHAPTER V

MAKING A NIGHT OF IT

But the heart of a boy soon recovers itself, and Murgatroyd was helped toward his self-possession by the tact of his companions, who began at once to talk and laugh to one another about anything and nothing, as if all grief and grievance were illusion. The young fellow sat up at last, wiped his eyes on the butt of his hand, and said: "You all know I'm a damned fool, so it's all right."

"You shall be as much of any kind of a fool as you like," said Horace, tenderly.

"But if anybody else says he is, we'll smash him," added Polydore.

"Lischen, hol' 'mal den Herrn noch ein frisches!" ordered Heinrich, peremptorily.

Then they began to have a good time with might and main. Polydore put forth a wonderful gift he had for telling comical narratives, out of his own experience, both on

the stage and in the affairs of private life. His mind was like a magic mirror, giving a quaint twist to whatever was reflected into it. Most of them had a touch or so too Rabelaisian for sober print—these reminiscences of Polydore; but they did no harm as the narrator produced them. Horace studded the talk with puns, from which Heinrich alone emerged unscathed, for he comprehended them not. But, by degrees, Murgatroyd—he, himself, who erewhile, in the select circle where he should have felt most at his ease, had been as an alien and miserable—Murgatroyd now blossomed forth luxuriantly, and revealed a host of companionable and frolicsome qualities. In this congenial atmosphere and company he could not and sought not to prevent his simple nature from flowing forth and displaying its strength and weakness. Simple, transparent, spontaneous truly he was, yet, as Maydwell had said, there was something more than bread and milk in his makeup. His social instincts were as thorough as those of a pet Newfoundland dog—he responded with every fibre to a human touch. He understood and reacted to whatever was natural; it was only the artificial that embarrassed and silenced

him. Accordingly, his character now developed definite form and quality. He was a type; he stood for something real, though it was not a patrician reality. He entered into the spirit of the hour, and the spirit entered into him. There is nothing that a boy can say or do to afford intellectual interest to grown men, but that is because he has no perspective of memory, no atmosphere of experience, to compass those effects whereby the intellect is won. The veriest child, however, may command a sort of interest in his elders which is far more potent than the intellectual, because it is aroused by the deepest, broadest quality in man's nature, common alike to child and man of the world. Years expand but do not create the essential human things.

Murgatroyd made his friends happy by showing them how happy they made him. He sang, with spirit and humor, and without fear of the method, some college nonsense songs; he related how he and a glutton in the class above his had eaten oysters for a wager, the loser to pay for all the oysters. His antagonist had collapsed on his twenty-second dozen; Murgatroyd had finished thirty dozen—raw, stewed, fried,

boiled, and steamed—with plenty of crackers; and had then walked into town, three miles, and eaten a couple of lobsters for supper. All this occurred while he was training for the crew. The coach heard of it and had "fired" him; though, really, he had felt better than ever the morning after. He told this anecdote because he thought it would entertain his listeners, as it did, with his telling; but it did not occur to him to narrate an episode that took place the day following his expulsion from the boat. How, being out in his own wherry to see the crew row by, with the hard-hearted coach after them in a steam-launch, that gentleman, in the midst of one of his most frenzied objurgations, had incontinently taken a header off the bows of the launch, which had run over him. Murgatroyd, knowing that the man could not swim, had plunged to his rescue, and not without inconvenience had managed to keep his head above water till the launch picked them up. There was nothing remarkable in this episode, as in that of the oysters and lobsters, so Murgatroyd made no mention of it.

But he made them laugh with the account he gave of the interview in which the presi-

dent of the college had insinuated the information that Murgatroyd would have to slink through the world unprotected by a sheepskin. It had been at the time anything but a laughing matter to Murgatroyd himself, but, as he remarked, "somehow when you've got through with a scare, it most always seems funny." "But look here, Murgy," said Polydore, "wouldn't you sooner have the sheep boiled with capers, than the sheepskin? What was it scared you?"

"Oh, it was father I was scared of," Murgy replied.

"Yes—gave you hell and Tommy, didn't he?" said Horace, between his teeth.

"He was just lovely to me," returned the boy, with much feeling. "He always is. I don't see how he can be to such an idiot as I am. What scares me is that he tells me what he'd like me to do and to be, and all that, and then I don't and ain't, and then I think, if I was he, what a dressing I'd give me; but all he ever does is just smile and say, 'That's no matter; that's all right!' But I'm so different from him! I don't see how a son can be, but I am. I guess that's what scares me and makes me

so miserable, because I can't help it. Just think of a man like him, at the top of everything, having a son like me! I'd pretty near kill me, sometimes, if I was him! It would have been all right, by thunder, if I'd been the footman or the groom; I could have been that just as well as anybody, and everybody'd been happy. I don't like swell people; I like you fellows and servants and tramps—and I like Sally Wintle, our housemaid; she gives me things to eat in the pantry, and I can sit and chat with her as thick as you please; she's right pretty and nice, I think. If I was the footman, I'd marry her; she'd have me, I guess. I could make her happy, I guess, but what good can I ever be to Miss ———. I tell you what, I don't understand these things. I wished I was dead at dinner this evening, but I can see well enough that it wasn't their fault; it wasn't mine either, for I'd give anything to be able to do the right thing, but I couldn't. It wasn't anybody's fault, and that's the worst of it, for what's to be done? And now that I'm twenty-one, it'll keep getting worse and worse! I suppose that's what makes poor mother so unhappy; she can't bear to talk and be jolly with me, like

other fellows' mothers, for fear I'll say or do something beastly. But when I sneak up and sit in the housekeeper's room—old Mrs. Ramage—she makes me feel as cosey and homelike as can be. I like the way she talks, servants' talk, not grammatical and clever, like the ladies that come to call. And I'd a hundred times rather go and sit with the grooms in the stable and chat with them, than go to the St. Quentin Club, where they're all so witty and gentlemanly. There was a fellow in the class above me in college, told me once I was a damned cad, and my fellows said I ought to lick him, and I could have, easy enough; but I didn't; I thought he said just the truth. I think the best thing I can do would be to run away and hide, so as they could never find me. I guess they wouldn't try very hard, and I wouldn't blame 'em." Here, Murgatroyd finished his beer.

"Lischen—noch eins—schnell!" said Heinrich.

"Run away? Not you! You stay where you are, and let them run away if they want to!" said Horace, angrily. "Be as low as you know how; rub it into 'em! Sit at table in your shirt-sleeves and eat with your

knife, and wipe your mouth on the back of your hand! You've as good a right to be what you are as they have; if your father and mother aren't suited with you, ask 'em what the devil they begot you for? You didn't force 'em to!"

Murgatroyd shook his head.

"If I could talk to 'em that way I wouldn't be what I am, and then it would be all right."

"He might hop the broomstick with Sally, though," observed Polydore, stroking his long nose; "that would bring things into shape in the wink of a goat's tail!"

The current of conversation was at this juncture diverted by a new arrival. Through the little wicket-gate came a jaunty and pretty feminine figure, and looming behind her the substantial person of the astrologer, Gabriel Negus. The young lady, as she entered, struck a pose, trilled an arpeggio, executed the neatest and most discreet kick imaginable, kissed both her hands to the company, and exclaimed:—"Hooray, boys. Keep your shirts on! It's me and Gabe; that's all. Knew you'd be here. How's my ducky-daddles?" The latter inquiry was addressed to Polydore, and was accompanied by a pair of little hands passed caressingly

down his cheeks and giving a twist to his mustachios. Then she patted the doctor on his bald head, winked at Heinrich, and stuck out her pretty lips in a provoking manner at Murgatroyd.

"Gabriel and his trumpet in the morning," said Horace, drawing up a chair for her between him and Polydore. "Is the star in the ascendant to-night? Did you bring the astrologer, or he you? You look the more 'fetching' of the two, seems to me."

"Look here, Letitia," said Polydore, "you'd ought to have been abed an hour ago, and you know it. Do you suppose I am going to slave myself to death for you, to have you go and cut up like this? You'll get the punomonia first thing you know, and instead of writing up the grand success of the charming young prima donna, Letitia Valentine, in her new opera, it'll be 'Sad death from exposure: A prominent pupil of Professor Scamel, the famous instructor in the——'"

The prima donna beat a tattoo on the table with her hands, and made bewitching grimaces of defiance.

"I vow, how can you boys sit by and hear him abuse me like that? Who was

your nigger last, Mr. Natural Method? That's all you care about—for me to advertise your stupid old method; you don't love me for myself one bit! All right; never mind, I know somebody that does; and he's rich, and he'll marry me for my goodness and beauty, and take me off the stage, and make my every lightest wish his law—won't you, Mur-ga-troyd, sweetheart? Only you must take my name instead of me yours, for I never could be the faithful helpmeet of a man who made me have a sore-throat every time I called him! Talk about pun-umonia! Well, I don't care. Gabe says I'm bound to be rich and famous anyway. It's written above. Kismet—no, Poly, I didn't say kiss me, and I won't forgive you. Please, Herr Heinrich, may I have some beer? These fellows think, because I'm an angel, I can live without food and drink and sitting up nights now and then. Nobody knows what an angel needs so well as the angel herself. Besides, the doctor can cure me, no matter what I do; can't you, Horace? The man who said prevention's better than cure didn't know how to live. I prefer cure every time! Only show me the doctor who guarantees that, and I go for him so quick you couldn't

see me for dust! Why, for pity's sake, don't some one say something? Do you suppose I can talk to you all the morning, after singing to the blessed public all night at $75 a week and find my own maid? Say, why didn't you boys take a box this evening? I just swept 'em off their feet, didn't I, Gabe?"

"I expect—maybe—you would have—if they'd—been on 'em," answered the soothsayer, letting his eyes, with a twinkle in them, slowly travel from face to face, and then bending over in a paroxysm of noiseless laughter.

"I wish there were more girls of your sort, Letty," said Murgatroyd, grinning delightedly at her. "I'd rather hear you than eat, whether it's singing or talking."

"He's been eating his birthday dinner and it didn't agree with him," Horace explained. "He's twenty-one."

"Twenty-one? My! Who'd think it? He doesn't look dry behind the ears yet. My dear, I'd give you twenty-one kisses if I wasn't afraid of spoiling you. Why didn't you invite me to the dinner and put a check for a million under my plate? Do you think your pa would give me a diamond necklace if I agreed to kick his hat off? I

wouldn't do it for that, though; it would bear my stock."

"What you mean is, if he asked you to kick on those terms you wouldn't kick," said Horace, resolute to let no opening escape him.

"That's rather above your average, friend," remarked Gabriel. "If you could —only—make 'em so fine that nobody'd —tumble to 'em—it would be perfect!" and he bowed himself down once more.

Polydore opened his mouth and yawned.

"Gracious!" cried Letitia, with a dramatic start; "to think of me sitting on the edge of such a crater as that, and no insurance! Murgy, I'm coming round to you. You've had your dinner, so there's no danger of your swallowing a poor girl alive." She jumped to her feet, when her eyes fell on a violin case standing in the corner. "Oh, Herr Heinrich!" she exclaimed, clapping her hands, "let's have a dance! Give us a jig and wake the boys up. And then I'll sing you my last new number. Come on, Frau Pilsen, let's we two girls wake these stupids up!"

Frau Pilsen's figure was not such as a maître de ballet would have been likely to

select as suitable for a première danseuse in the grand opera. Her body had the form of an egg, loosely confined near the middle by a string. Upon the top of this was set a huge head with no neck; while her large, fat feet bulged out of slippers much too small for them. But one must not judge by outward appearances; if the spirit be right, the accidents of the material envelope are of small import.

The hour for closing the saloon had for some time been passed, and every guest in the outer room had departed. The table in the small room was moved into a corner, and Herr Heinrich seated himself upon it, tucking his fiddle under his chin. The other men ranged themselves round the walls. Letitia took up a position on the small vacant space of floor, and Frau Pilsen, all smiles and graces, planted herself opposite. The music began.

Letitia's every movement was grace, and there was in her also a verve, a chic, and a roguish significance that vastly heightened the fascination of her performance. But Frau Pilsen was wonderful—almost incredible! Her movements were not extensive, nor were they violent. They were little

more than suggestions, but they were the suggestions of genius. The beckoning of a foot, the intimation of a knee, the defiance of a bust, the challenge of a wrist—above all, the fathomless diablerie of a pair of eyes which till now had seemed but punctures in a broadside of rubicund visage, and the slightest inclinations and upturnings of the head, hitherto intractable—an attempt to convey these things humiliates the writer by the revelation of the total inadequacy of language. What depths of mischievous archness, of knowledge of human nature, of humorous naughtiness, of seductive subtlety, became radiant from this seeming clumsy mass of woman! What intelligence, what point, what accuracy! From one point of view she was grotesque, preposterous, ludicrous, but to a keener penetration the mind, the soul within the outer grossness, became discernible, and beside its achievement even Letitia's sparkling skill must admit itself outdone. The pair of them combined to present a cancan of merit so transcendent as this dull earth has seldom witnessed.

Meanwhile Herr Heinrich nodded his head with rhythmic complacency, and sent his bow capering over the strings, and the spec-

tators beat time with soft hand-clappings, and occasional irrepressible murmurs of joy, all being done with sedulous precaution to keep within the limit of noise permissible in the place and hour. The little room's window gave upon an inner court, and the shutters were closed, so that no one passing along the alley would have detected any sound. But suddenly the fiddle bow stopped and the fiddler lifted his hand. The dancers dropped panting into their chairs and all was still.

"Harg!" said Heinrich, elevating his forefinger in front of his nose, and inclining his head to one side.

A tapping on the outside of the shutter was audible—very light, but given in a certain measure. There was a short pause, and then it was repeated in the same way.

"Bobbies?" whispered Polydore.

"Nein, nein! Was das Polizei betrifft, vor dat we are all right," said Heinrich, getting down from the table and returning the fiddle to its case. "It will be dose vellows—I had forgodden—some beople dat will business disguss privat bedween demselves, vat I dold gould gome here. Na, beste freunde, it will be a liddle lade al-

ready. Dill to-morrow it must be gut night. Lischen ! Mac' 'mal die thuer' offen fur den Herrshaft ! Beste empfehlung —wohl zu bekommen—adieu ! "

They filed out in silence, each exchanging a nod or a touch of the hand with Frau Pilsen as she stood beside the open door. The last to emerge into the open air was, as it happened, Murgatroyd. He stopped a moment at the foot of the steps to turn up his coat collar, having neglected to bring an overcoat. The others had gone forward in the darkness. As he moved to follow them he felt a touch on the shoulder and turned. A man of medium stature was before him, but it was too dark to discern his features or any details of his appearance.

" Beg pardon," said the man, with a slightly Irish intonation, " would your name be Whiterduce ? "

" Yes. Who are you ? "

" Smith is my name. I know your father. Would he be at his office to-morrow morning, do you know ? He did me a service, and I'd be glad to pay my acknowledgments."

" At his office ? I guess not. He doesn't often go there. By the way, he will be

there to-morrow morning, though, about ten o'clock. I'll tell him——"

"No, no, don't trouble yourself; I'll may be not see him after all. The thought just crossed my mind. Sorry to trouble you; good-night, sir."

He drew back and was lost in the darkness, but Murgatroyd fancied he saw two or three other ambiguous figures in the obscurity to the left of the steps. He walked on, and found the others awaiting him at the alley entrance.

"Hollo, little pet," said Horace, as he joined them, "we weren't sure but you'd gone on ahead of us. Stopped for a flirt with Frau Pilsen, did you?"

"Some fellow wanted to see my father. No consequence, I guess. It reminded me I have an appointment with my father at his office to-morrow afternoon. Guess I'd better trot home now—it's cold!"

"Be off with you, bless you," was the reply, and with a good-night to the others Murgatroyd jogged away.

CHAPTER VI

TWO VOICES

"Why did you do it? What can compensate for it? It is a sin against him, too, poor creature, as well as against me—and nature! You cannot justify it!"

"Be moderate, Arabella. You are losing your judgment. I was sorry to hear that indiscretion of yours at the table last night. I'm afraid others noticed it. It was bad taste."

"I can't bear it much longer. Remember what I was, and look at me now! A living death. Oh, it's the truth! Twenty-one years of shame and falsehood! I've done all a woman can do; but I'm not a woman—everything womanly in me has been tortured till it's dead. But sometimes it comes over me what life was and might have been, and then something struggles to break out of me; I suppose it's madness. Madness is the only life possible for me now! If you

had been husbandlike to me—given me your confidence; but, oh, the loneliness! Why did you do it? Have I ever harmed you? Did I ask you to marry me? Did you make me your wife because you hated me? Then why in mercy didn't you kill me at the beginning? Do you hate me so much that you want me to live? What is to be the end of it all?"

"Arabella, you're wrong. My motives are simple, though there are reasons why I can't discuss them. In affairs men are one another's trustees; their secrets are not their own to tell. I have not practised reticence for its own sake. And you must admit that I have been more forbearing than some men would have been."

"Forbearing about what?"

"Toward you."

"Forbearing? What reason. I don't understand!"

"Technically that is true; for since I determined, from the start, not to take the ordinary course in the circumstances, I considered that our mutual comfort would be best consulted by abstaining from all allusion to it. I have never accused you in all these many years, nor have you ever con-

fessed, but I have always presumed that you understood me, as I did you."

"Confessed!"

"You can't imagine I was ignorant?"

"Why do you smile like that? Confessed?"

"Come, it's not worth while at so late a day. Some things are best left unsaid. Our life has been a comedy—a tragedy if you like—but don't let us end it with a farce. Besides, if explanations were begun, they might go farther than you think for. I have naturally felt at liberty to deal with the situation as I found it. But let us stop where we are."

"No! Oh—if it were all some terrible mistake! Not terrible, blessed, in spite of all the wrong and ruin. I almost have a hope. . . . But it can't be. I'm afraid. Will you answer me one question?"

"If it involves no other person's confidence."

"If I have done you an injustice, I'll lie down and kiss your feet. Oh, my heart! Ever since Murgatroyd was a year old, I have thought—there was an instinct—I felt. . . . Tell me the truth! I have believed he was not our son."

"Not our son? Well, Arabella, I have thought so, too. But what is your question?"

"Why do you smile? I ask you. . . . Good God!"

"Well, I shall put an end to this. I do it reluctantly. I have believed, and known, that your son was not also mine. You remember he was an eight month child. Let me finish——"

"Oh, let me laugh—let me die—oh! Poor fool! All these years, indeed! And you never—your forbearance. Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was going to say that this premature birth did not disturb me; it only served as a minor confirmation of direct evidence. You were very ill at the time; there was fear of your life. The child suffered, too. I don't know if you recollect a man—a groom—by the name of James Mouncey? He married a former maid of yours, Annie Swift—your servant before your own marriage."

"Yes! I dismissed her for—she was not an honest girl. Yes; well?"

"But she had your confidence at one time. Very likely she knew more than you suspected of your affairs. She knew of your acquaint-

ance with General Stepyngstone. There is nothing surprising in you and he having been mutually attracted. To be sure, we had been betrothed at that time, but I am not so unreasonable as to suppose that you accepted me for my——"

"I understand; I took you for your money, and you me for my beauty. But keep to the story, please."

"Your friend, Miss Fenton, who is Mrs. Stepyngstone now, had you down to visit her at her villa in Newport, about a month before our wedding——"

"Yes—ah! I know—I see! He was there all the time. He did make love to me at first. I remember it all. Annie Swift slept in the small chamber opening out of mine. One night he . . . but tell me what you found out."

"As you say, one night he spent in your room. Annie saw him go in. You dismissed her soon after. She married Mouncey. He lost money betting on races. She told him what she had seen, with the idea that it would be worth money to me to know it, that I would pension them not to let it go further. You had been my wife then about six months."

"Poor husband! Yes. And you believed her unsupported word?"

"No; I did not accept unsupported evidence."

"Where could you get confirmation?"

"There was only one possible source. Your friend Miss Fenton confirmed it."

"Mary Fenton confirmed it? You asked her if it was true that I had . . . and she said it was?"

"Yes; but you are speaking louder than you are perhaps aware of, Arabella. There is no way out of it, you see. I wish you had taken my hint at first. Silence has been my way from the first, and it is the best."

"Give me time to breathe and think! Mary Fenton dared to tell you that! Your silence served her well, but it ruined us! It has served her twenty years, but I will have my turn now! You shall hear what she will say when I ask her the question that you asked her! Oh, if you and I were young again! What a waste it has been, a tragic, useless waste! And yet I'm happier than at any time since my child was born. And so shall you be! I don't blame you; I forgive you; it is no wonder you believed. But it was false! How could I ever do such a wick-

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edness? I loved you! When he tried to make love to me I let him know what my feeling was, both toward you and him! He never presumed again. But Mary was infatuated with him, and she was a rich match for a poor half-pay officer. When I warned him away he turned to her, partly in pique, maybe, and partly for the reasons of a man of the world, who has social position, but no money. Mary was infatuated; she had no prudence. I have sacredly kept her secret all these years; I never dreamed of telling it. And she took advantage of it to destroy all the light of my life. There is no punishment severe enough for such treachery. But if you and I understand each other, even at this long last, I do not care for revenge. She shall tell you the truth in my presence, but that is all."

"You seem to have settled something in your own mind, Arabella; but I confess I have no notion what you mean."

"It's terribly simple. She accused me to shield herself."

"To shield herself from what?"

"Her little brother, a boy of seven, slept in her room with her. There was a boat moored at the little private pier in front of

the villa. I was fond of sailing in those days, and could manage a boat. I had always wanted to take a moonlight sail, and on this night I sat up late looking at the moonlight, and at last I thought I would go down and take a sail. I went to Mary's room to ask her to go with me, but she would not. She had not gone to bed, and was excited, though I didn't notice it then. I went out alone, very quietly, so as to awaken no one. I thought I saw some one in the shrubbery as I went down to the pier, but I was not sure. There was a soft, light breeze; I unmoored the boat, and hoisted the sail and sailed out. I was gone three or four hours. I thought of you, and of our married life to come, all the time I was sailing, and wished you had been in the boat with me. By the time I got back the moon had set, and it was the dark before dawn. As I came up toward the house, through the shrubbery, I saw a man appear at my window, step out, and let himself down from the roof of the veranda. At first I thought it was a burglar, but as he reached the ground and went off I recognized him—it was Stepyngstone. I had the key of the side door of the house, and I slipped in and up to my

room. I met Mary just stealing out. I made her go back in there with me. She went down on her knees; she almost fainted; we had a long talk. I promised to keep her secret. The next day I went away. I never thought of Annie Swift—neither of us did. But she behaved impertinently to me after that, and I missed jewels and other things, and I found she was misbehaving with some one—Mouncey, I suppose; so I dismissed her. I remember her telling me I would regret it, but I didn't know what she meant.

"When you asked Mary about Annie's story, she knew that if she denied it so far as I was concerned, the truth would sooner or later come out about her. That is all the affair, my husband . . . my husband! It comes very late, but that is not my fault. My husband . . . It seems as if I had never said that word before! After all, it isn't too late, is it? We are both alive; we can begin to live, now. Seems to me I feel life running into my veins again. Oh, what a mountain of misery this clears away, and what a night of blind darkness! And Murgatroyd! Poor fellow! I have never treated him like a mother; I suppose it was

my own unnatural state that always made him seem in some way strange to me. But I will make it up to him! He shall be happy, too.

"My husband—you believe me, don't you? You shall hear it from Mary herself to-morrow—no! to-day. She shall come here to-day and tell you . . . Yes, my husband, look at me! Come close and look me straight in the eyes with all your might! There is nothing but truth to see, so far down as you can go. No—look!"

"I do believe you. I wish that were all."

"What else? Oh, my heart!—don't ——"

"No, no—give me time. It concerns myself—what else there is. But, speaking of truth, we must recognize one truth—that no great wrong, like this, can ever be righted. You and I can never return in feeling or in character, any more than in years, to what we were when we were lovers. If we have travelled for a score of years on wrong roads, and away from each other, we can't meet in a moment now. We are not the same beings that we should have been. We can never become so, however we might de-

sire it. We are total strangers to each other. The most we can do would be to begin to make each other's acquaintance. So much I can see plainly; though what you have said roots up and overturns almost everything that I had thought certain and unchangeable."

"You mean you can never love me? Ah, Mary Fenton!"

"I don't know you. And I can't learn to know you so easily as if we were ordinary strangers, because I've been all this time believing you to be quite another person than you are. So, you see, it is too soon to bring up the question of love, and we are getting old! Don't think me discourteous. I always try to see things as they are. Well, I must admit I have not succeeded well in the attempt, so far—but you understand my meaning.

"My mind has been locked up so long that I find difficulty in opening it. No one has seen into it, since you looked your last before our marriage. I never meant anyone should again. To change one's habit is like bending back a tree that has grown and hardened awry. Perhaps as much will be destroyed as gained. But some things must

be said. Excuse me if I speak in a business tone and phraseology. It is only that I have used them so long that I have no other at command. I don't intend any disrespect or insensibility.

"I had meant to make my wife the end and occupation of my life, but when circumstances altered, I looked about for something else to interest me. I could not feel an interest in any other woman—there's nothing of that in what I have to tell. Of course, the child that was born—under the persuasion I was—I didn't feel drawn to him. It's er—painful to think that he was really our own child, after all. I never knew till now that I lost my only son when he died."

"It was true, then? Oh, it was true!"

"Yes; but kindly let me go on without interruption; at best, as I said, it isn't easy. You were delirious with fever during your confinement, and a nurse was got for the child, a decent seeming woman of the lower class; she said her husband was on the railroad, and was killed a month or two before the birth of her own child. This turned out to be false; the child was born out of wedlock, and the father was living. But that would not have mattered—such false-

hoods are common under the circumstances, and do no harm—but for a step of my own.

"You—er—our child died in the second month. The nature of your illness, not to speak of other reasons, made it impossible there could ever be another. But I wanted an heir, and I thought it better he should be brought up in the family as my son, than to leave my property to be divided among relatives—persons we have never recognized—or to openly adopt anyone later in life. I had seen the nurse's baby—a fine-looking, healthy child. You can understand that, believing what I did, I thought I might become fonder of the boy, after he had grown up and been educated under my eye, than I could have hoped to be of the child who died. So I decided to buy him of his mother, taking measures, of course, that they should be permanently separated at once. I sent her to Australia, with an annuity, so long as she stayed there. I provided against blackmail by causing her to sign a confession of infanticide—a pure fiction, of course—but by means of which it would have been possible to procure her conviction, had she broken our contract and reappeared in this country. I entirely over-

looked the contingency that actually occurred. She got word, after starting on her journey, to the father of her child; he joined her at Rio, where the vessel stopped; married her there, and, as I have suspected, caused her death, after possessing himself of the facts of the case. At all events, I received a communication from him within a year, claiming the paternity of the child, and making the usual threats. It was then too late for me to disown the boy as my son, and I made terms with the man. But he has been an annoyance to me ever since. And there have been other complications—but I need not enter on those now.

"I have always felt a kindness for Murgatroyd, and, of late years, a sincere compassion for him also. You know him, I suppose, as well as I do; he has not turned out what I hoped to make him; he is quite incompatible with the rank of life into which I brought him. But he is a good, genuine, natural creature, and there's no service I would not gladly do him. The question is, what to do? Of course his real father cannot deprive him of his inheritance; were I to die to-morrow, that would still be his by the terms of my will. But he does not care

for the things which the inheritance puts in his power. Certainly, he might turn the holdings into cash, and make ducks and drakes of it in any way that pleased him; but he is a very conscientious boy, and anxious to do what he thinks I will approve, at the same time that he is never at ease or happy in so doing. The problem has been constantly before me for some time past. In spite of his good will, the poor boy is mentally incapable of carrying on—er—certain affairs which have occupied me. But he is now of age, and some action must be taken. I made up my mind to a step which I have arranged to take this very day. Briefly it is this: To tell him the facts about his parentage, then give him his choice—either to keep the secret, or to publish it. He may either continue the artificial life he has heretofore led, or enter openly and avowedly into the rank and companionship that he was born to. In the former case, he will marry Miss Sharingbourne, and will be bound in honor to maintain the mask of patricianhood all his life long; otherwise—well, you comprehend the alternative. Should he choose the latter, as I expect he will, I shall arrange that he always receives an adequate

support—adequate to that station in life—so settled on him that rascals could not rob him of it, nor he be deprived of it by imprudences of his own. His appearing in his true colors would also put an end to the blackmailing annoyance. On the other hand, the social consequences to me—to us—would be so unpleasant that—You wish to say something?"

"What can I say? All this seems so pitiable, and yet it's like the rattling of dead bones! There has been deception, and it has brought its consequences, and they have to be met somehow. Seems to me no open humiliation could be worse than to go on deceiving. I've felt deception in the air I breathe so long that now that this first stir of truth has come I don't think I have courage, patience, to argue whether it should continue. My poor mother brought me up to regard worldly things, but my life (if it can be called a life) has taught me that there's nothing real and worth having but love and truth. I'm glad, I suppose, that my instinct about Murgatroyd was right; I've always thought of our own baby as being happy in Heaven, and I'm glad that hateful fear is gone that—forgive me for it; I was groping

in darkness, and everything seemed evil—I believed he must have the right to call you father. Perhaps I ought to sympathize with your concern about him, but I can find nothing in my heart but one want—I want my husband! You say that we are strangers and old, but isn't it putting away love that has made us so? Isn't love the very life and self of a man and woman? How can it be strange? What has it to do with age? If we were to lift ourselves up and say, 'We will be our own selves!' would it not all come rushing back to us? Then I could think of other things, for I should be human again; I cannot say now. Can't you feel what I'm trying to say? Can't you trust it? Oh, my husband!"

"I think perhaps you're right, Arabella; probably you are right. But I find a deficiency in myself. I can accept your view as an abstract proposition, but I can't—I don't seem able as yet to adopt it in feeling—to live it. You spoke of being, so to say, dead—of death in life; and now you feel the power to renew life under certain conditions. I fancy it's rather the other way about with me. I've kept up a life in outward things, but I've suffered death inwardly, and that's

the sort of death, I fear, from which one doesn't recover. I can remember a time when what you say would have had a vital effect upon me, but—to be honest with myself and you—I cannot say I am moved now as I should have been then. The intellect seems as active and efficient in me as ever—more so, perhaps—but—I am sorry to distress you, though I might envy you the ability to shed tears; but you must try to feel the indulgence for me that you would for a cripple, or a deaf or dumb person. Possibly I may improve. I think if I had this affair of Murgatroyd's off my mind I could give more vigorous attention to your suggestions. I feel that I've done him an injury—taken an unwarrantable liberty with him. It is certainly foolish to venture on experiments of that kind. But, as I say, having nothing else to occupy myself with, I allowed myself to become deeply absorbed in—er—certain matters, and very anxious and ambitious to leave some one behind me who could take up and carry on what I had established. I certainly brought up Murgatroyd in order to satisfy this ambition, and in so far you may say the motive was a selfish one, but certainly, too, I had no misgiving but it would

be a happy thing for him to be raised into our sphere of life, with its wealth and other advantages instead of remaining in the gutter and tenement-house condition to which he was born. But it seems I was mistaken; so I want to put it right, as far as I can, even though it involves my—our personal discomfort. That is, if you agree with me—as I understand you're disposed to do. We might arrange to go abroad for awhile; people's memories are short; only there are circumstances which might make it less easy for me to leave, just at present, than for you; but I could join you later, no doubt. However, I am forgetting that this sort of discussion wearies you. I feel strangely weary myself, though I could hardly say of what—I suppose the effort to adjust myself to this unexpected turn of things. Well, I'm not so young as I used to be. Something is gone out of me. Old age reconciles one to the prospect of—ending it all! Especially when one has lived wrong, as I seem to have done. It's queer that we Whiterduces should be coming to an end in this way! Well, we must end somehow, and what a struggle and pain it is to keep a-going, after all. I've thought, now and then, that perhaps I was a

bit insane on the subject of the Whiterduces; perhaps my ancestors were, too! Plenty of enemies, plenty of servants and acquaintances. I don't know about friends! It's queer. I believe I should begin to envy poor Murgatroyd if I went on! Don't mind me, Arabella; I'm getting senile. I'll be better to-morrow. I must be off now. I have some papers to look over at the office, and afterward, my appointment with Murgatroyd. Excuse me for detaining you so long."

"I want you to do one thing for me before you go."

"Certainly! Don't feel shy, or agitated, about asking me to do anything for you. What is it?"

"You haven't done this for twenty-one years."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Oh, my husband! Take my hands in yours—look at me—I am the girl you loved and married—I loved you—I love you now—we are husband and wife! Think of it—feel it—feel it! Hold my hands firm—don't loose them! There is no comfort or rest but love; if you will trust in it, it will come. Even to speak its name hopefully

will help. Do not let yourself be chilled and doubtful; believe, and you will feel something kindle in you. Look at me—speak to me! Say, 'My wife!' Kiss me!"

"Yes, yes, my wife—you are my wife. . . . Ah! I did not think I could kiss a woman. I must not lose myself—if this is myself—it's so faint. . . . You are stronger than I. Is that your heart, moving so? Don't unman me. It must be gradual. I'm confused. I don't know myself. My wife!"

"You shall know yourself in me."

CHAPTER VII

SILENCE

The morning of the 14th of November was crisp and fine; a bright, clear sunshine, a light, pure breeze, cold enough to call color to the faces of pedestrians; and whispering to them, perhaps, that the days of foot-ball were come, and that of roast turkey and pumpkin-pie was not far away. They looked cheerful, at all events, as they hastened along the sidewalks, with heads up and hands in overcoat pockets. The clear, blue sky overhead led one to believe that there could be nothing hopelessly unclean in the earth it overarched. Hope was in the air.

Murgatroyd, after his day of honors, pains, and compensations, had slept sound, and also late, as a young man has a right to do who can win oyster wagers—who has no burden on his conscience, and none that he cannot digest on his stomach. He awoke — as healthy young folks who have slept well do

—all at once, and at peace with the world. He jumped up and went over to the dressing-table to look at his watch; but he had forgotten to wind it over-night, and it stood at ten minutes to five. So he glanced out of the window, took an observation by the sun, and judged it could not be far from ten o'clock.

Fifteen minutes later he was down-stairs in the breakfast-room, two hours late. But he knew that old Mrs. Ramage was his true ally, and that Sally Wintle would not fail him; and, indeed, the latter entered just as his hand was on the bell, and said: "Oh, Master Murgatroyd, ain't you late! Well, I don't suppose you expect any breakfast this morning, I declare!"

"Oh, Sally, be spry, there's a peach! I've got to meet father down town right off, and I'm as hungry as Old Boots. I can smell steak and omelette—hurry now, and I'll give you a kiss!"

"Indeed, Mr. Murgatroyd!—and you a grown-up man, and married, or as good as! Yes, I should think you'd blush!"

"Oh, well—— Oh, Sally, do hurry, and I'll never say you're a pretty girl again, no matter how much I think so!"

"Well, sakes alive, I never see such a man."

However, the steak and omelette appeared, and disappeared almost as quickly. Sally and Murgatroyd parted good friends. As he plunged out into the hall to get his hat Mrs. Whiterduce came down-stairs.

"Oh, good-morning, ma'am. I got late. I've got to meet father. Good-by."

"Wait a moment, dear!" Murgatroyd stopped short; she had not spoken to him in that tone, nor called him "dear," since he could remember. He stared at her. She did not look the same as usual; there was an expression in her eyes, and about her mouth —a tender, soft, shining expression—that gave him a sudden ache in the back of his throat. It was a very different feeling from the one he had had the night before, when he glanced round the table for some sympathetic face, and had seen hers, still and cold and remote — a mother without love or motherliness.

"Why, mother!" he said, in a husky voice.

"Yes, dear, call me mother. You shall feel you have a mother while I live. A real, true, loving mother!" She came

gently up to him, put her delicate hands on his shoulders, drew down his head, and kissed him.

"Why, mother!" he said again, with a gulp and a whimper this time. "Why do you—— What is it?"

She looked at him, softly and tenderly.

"You're so beautiful and lovely," quavered he. "I never knew it before. You make me feel so good——"

"God bless you, my dear, and help me to make you always good and happy. Now, I'll give you a message. Tell papa, with my dearest love—mind! tell him not to stay away longer than he can help; I want him, and tell him not to forget what I told him before he went away. Don't forget about my love; and tell him I'm very happy—happier than I ever was—and that I'm sure we shall be always happier and happier. Can you remember all that? It seems a good deal to remember, doesn't it? and yet it is a simple thing, in itself."

"I'll remember it; I'll never forget it, no fear of that! I couldn't if I tried. It's the best thing I ever heard, and guess father'll think so too. Is this you, really? You dear mother. Well, I—well, good-by!"

If the morning was fine before, it was now resplendent. But Murgatroyd, as he trudged along the handsome street, felt as if he were poising some valuable object on his head, which, should he make a wrong movement, would fall and be broken. This was a strange event. What did it mean? He walked, with his eyes fixed, in an abstraction. He beheld always that picture of his mother, his newly discovered, tenderly smiling mother, pale, gentle, stately, with dark, delicate brows and softly shining eyes, dressed in some graceful, simple morning robe, like a Greek, but no longer like a statue. There were silver touches on the ripple of her dark hair. She had told him to call her "mother." Murgatroyd had never regarded the parental relation as implying anything pleasurable to the son. If the latter got through the day without being made to feel that he had made a beast or an ass of himself, it was much. This attitude had become matter of course to him. He supposed it to be normal in all families, and that other boys, as a matter of course, enjoyed the society of their Mrs. Ramages the housekeeper and their Oliver Crookets the groom better than that of their father and mother. He had some-

times wondered why his parents had seemed to be of an altogether different order of creation from himself—different in soul and body—for he had reasoned that this could hardly be the case in all families. But so far as the distant and critical attitude was concerned, that was no doubt, he thought, natural and inevitable; parents who did not exhibit it were to be regarded with suspicion. Well, then, what was to be thought of this wonderful transfiguration of his mother? If she had been his mother before what was she now? And if only now what had she been hitherto? Struggling with this problem, he was reaching the conclusion that she had been transfigured out of a mother, but into something far more delightful, when his name, spoken in a clear, cool voice, brought him abruptly back to the concrete, and to the fact that Isabella Sharingbourne was before him, with Devereux Scaramanga by her side.

They smiled upon him with patrician serenity; evidently there had been no transfiguration in their case. "Ah, I was expecting you," said Scaramanga; "I was snatching a hasty joy while opportunity served. You have not indulged me with your

property over long, but I resign her to you with thanks for the shortest favors." And he lifted his hat with ironic courtesy.

"I don't think Mr. Whiterduce was looking for me—or thinking of me," said Isabella, looking her betrothed over composedly.

"I wasn't; I'd no idea you'd be around at this time," returned the guileless youth. "I'm going to meet my father down at his office; I guess I'm late. Well, good-by."

Scaramanga glanced at Isabella, arching his black eyebrows with demure amusement; she smiled, keeping her clear eyes on Murgatroyd. "It's very nice of you," she said. "Good-by."

Murgatroyd hurried along, feeling that perhaps he had not done the right thing, but glad to get away. Etiquette was still an obscure subject to him. He would not have had the audacity to show jealousy toward Isabella—his "property," indeed! He could imagine being jealous about other girls, such as Letitia, or Sally; but if ever a girl was her own proprietor—able to take care of herself better than anyone could do it for her—the future Mrs. Whiterduce was that young lady. He dismissed the subject from his mind.

His way led him past the St. Quentin Club; before he was aware of it he was in the midst of a little knot of gentlemen who were going slowly in the same direction. There were Verinder Vyse, Stukely Poyntell, Aubert Frewin, and one or two more.

"Hullo, Murgatroyd," said Frewin, turning upon him that ever scrutinizing and yet preoccupied gaze of his, which sought what was artistically available in nature, and discarded the rest; "I've just got a subject for a picture—'The Transfiguration of Caliban;' will you give me an order for it?"

"Keep clear of the clutches of poor artists—poor in both senses, Whiterduce," said Vyse. "We must call you Whiterduce now. But if you want to encourage art, regard the poet and romancer. Establish an American academy with a fortune every year for the best work of pure imagination, 'The Whiterduce Prize.'"

"And appoint me to pass judgment on the work of the competitors," said Poyntell. "I'll protect you against impostors!"

"Come inside: we're going to have a cocktail," said Vyse. "'Tis not so sweet as woman's lip, but oh, 'tis more sincere!"

"Oh, thank you, but I can't," replied

Murgatroyd. "I've got to meet my father at his office, and I guess I'm a little late. Good-by!

"They seem always to be making fun of everything," he thought as he trudged on. "Not the way Horace and Polydore and that sort of fellows do; but so as to make you feel uncomfortable. It makes you laugh, but it doesn't make you feel good. I wonder if I shall ever get the hang of it! I guess not; I can't think of the things to say, and I wouldn't like to say 'em, anyway."

He turned out of the Street of Fashion and approached the business parts of the city. Here was the tall marble building of the *Constitution* newspaper, and on its steps, with his hands clasped behind him, and his chin on his breast, the great figure of the editor, Blackmer Risdon, listening to Judge Hemynge, who was talking with gesture and emphasis. The big eyes of the man of newspapers, rolling slowly under his deep brows, fell upon Murgatroyd as he drew near, and he put out an arm, like a railroad stoppage signal. The Judge turned brusquely.

"Murgatroyd," boomed the editor, "we were speaking of an angel, and along comes a cherub—at least, I presume cherubs are

angels' children—we'll ask Agabag about that. Do you know if your father thinks of coming down town to-day?"

"He's down already—at his office; I was just going there to meet him."

The Judge tapped impressively with a forefinger on the left breast of the young man's coat, as if to determine whether he were hollow or stuffed with sawdust. "My boy," he said, peering at him with his comedy scowl, "can you carry a message to him?"

"I don't know," rumbled Blackmer, in a half aside. "Eh?—I don't know. What do you think?"

"Hum! that's so; may be you're right. Besides, I'm going that way myself presently. Yes, my boy," he said, ceasing his sounding experiment, and patting him on his elbow, with his head aslant, "yes—well—you're pretty stout, ain't you? All you young chaps are gymnasts nowadays. Could knock out Risdon in one round, I expect—what?—in one round."

"Well, I reckon he might, now; they teach 'em boxing tricks; I get illustrated articles for the paper. But I could have thrown him when I was younger—yes, sir!

When I was logging up in Maine, along in the fifties, I wrastled every man there, and there wasn't one of 'em could down me. But I've been thrown since, now and again," he added, shaking his shoulders with a cavernous chuckle.

"I guess I'm a little late—I'll have to go," said Murgatroyd, repeating once more the burden of his song.

"Go along, my boy; just tell your father I'll look in on him before noon; say I don't want to miss him! Ta ta! In one round—what?"

"Step up stairs," said the editor, taking him by the arm. "Let's have a squint at it sitting down; there may be nothing in it after all."

Murgatroyd turned into another street, in which were still standing some of the older buildings of the city built when twenty-story Towers of Babylon were unknown. There were signs of age everywhere; the sidewalks were uneven and the pavement of the narrow street had a wavy surface, like an estuary turned into cobblestones. It was a respectable place, however; the buildings were all occupied as offices, mostly of lawyers and real-estate agents; names were legible on

the small brass plates which had been known in the commercial directories for generations. It was a quiet neighborhood, the main lines of traffic were elsewhere, and when a vehicle found it necessary to thread this venerable lane, it proceeded at a walk, steering carefully from the crest of one stony undulation to another. On one side, opposite the office buildings, was an old church and churchyard, clustered with dingy monuments and gravestones, and with stunted tress growing here and there, now leafless and forlorn.

To come into this region was like passing from the rattle and sparkle of our *fin de siècle* into the old-fashioned thirties and forties of the century. You involuntarily slackened your pace and drew less hurried breath.

The greater number of these buildings had been owned by the Whiterduces time out of mind, and it was in one of them that our own Pynchepole had his office. For although he had no business, technically speaking, an "office" had been a family appurtenance always, and it was, of course, a necessity for persons with so vast an estate. Appointments with lawyers, agents, and men of business of all kinds were held here;

there was a safe vault, in which securities representing nobody knew how much and other valuable or curious documents were kept; and no doubt the Whiterduces used to come here sometimes simply for the sake of being alone and inaccessible by the world in which they held such considerable stakes. No one would disturb them here, because they were never supposed to be here except by special appointment; and even if some chance visitor were to knock at the door it was only necessary to keep silent and he would soon take himself off.

The Whiterduce office occupied the ground floor of the building. There were several rooms, opening into one another and looking out at the back on a small court-yard with a high brick wall. Adjoining this yard was another, belonging to a building on the next street. The rooms were soberly but solidly furnished, and were kept in order by a man and his wife, the latter dusting them every morning and the former walking through them every night to see that everything was as it should be. Nothing had ever been otherwise than it should be during the twenty years of their incumbency, and there was no tradition that anything had

ever been, from the beginning. The Whiterduces and all appertaining to them were invariably all right.

As Murgatroyd mounted the worn stone steps he said to himself: "I wonder if father'll seem as different this morning as mother did! If I could only get over being scared of him I should think we might get on first rate."

He stepped into the narrow hallway and knocked on the door—the first door to the right. He heard no answer, but he turned the latch and the door opened. "It's me," he said as he went in.

He shut the door behind him. As he did so he thought he heard a window at the back of the building shut down with an echoing slam. Supposing that Mr. Whiterduce must be in the back room, he crossed the small antechamber which he had entered and passed through the glazed partition into the room next to it. Here was a large desk table, and Murgatroyd, glancing beneath it, saw his father's feet and the lower part of his legs as he sat in the chair at the other side. The upper structure of the desk hid his father's head and shoulders from sight.

"I guess I'm a little late," said Murga-

troyd, and he came round and looked down upon the other; "I overslept——"

He stopped. Mr. Whiterduce sat with his head and body bent forward, and his arms hanging down—an extraordinary posture. His face was pressed down on a litter of papers on the desk. He had fainted.

After the moment's shock was over, Murgatroyd, fetching his breath again, bent forward and put his hand lightly on his shoulder. His purpose was, if his father did not rouse up at once, to carry him to the sofa and try to revive him. The coat, where he touched it, was wet. Had someone else been throwing water over him? He withdrew his hand; it felt sticky; he looked at it; it was smeared with red—was it blood? It was blood! He gave back a step or two, as if he himself had been dealt a mortal blow.

A pang of horror twisted through him from head to foot, like a serpent. It left his body numb; he was no longer conscious of it; he was all thought and action. He felt for his father's heart. It was still, but the body was yet warm. Then he remembered that window that had been slammed at the rear; in another moment he found himself there;

there was a smear of bloody fingers on the sash where it had been seized to open the window; the murderer had escaped that way. He was not in the yard; a packing-case stood against the opposite wall; he had climbed over and passed out through the building opposite. He had had time enough; it would be useless to pursue him now.

Then the first thing to be done was to get help. Murgatroyd's mind worked logically but rigidly; one idea followed the previous one in order, but nothing was mapped out beforehand.

He hurried back to the front. The sight of the body still in its awkward posture at the desk gave him a new shock; it was dead; death is strange. He got past it, not looking full at it, but only too clearly aware of its every detail out of the corner of his eye. Once in the antechamber he sprang through it to the outer door and wrenched it open.

He threw a look up and down the silent street. His lips were just opening to scream out "Murder!" when he saw a figure leisurely advancing in his direction. The straight, strong figure of a man, with his hat

in his bare hand, in spite of the cold, while with his other hand he meditatively felt the surface of his bald poll, as a gardener examines his garden-bed to see whether the seeds have begun to sprout yet. There was no mistaking that bald head, that investigating hand, that independent, leisurely gait, that virile figure. It was Horace Maydwell.

CHAPTER VIII

AN ESCAPE

Murgatroyd felt that Horace was the man of all men for such an occasion, and with that recognition his own efficiency forsook him. Strength went out of his legs, and he sat down heavily on the steps, sweating and nauseated. He panted like one who has overrun himself in a race.

Horace caught sight of him while yet at a distance of twenty yards, lifted his eyebrows with jocose surprise, and began to smile.

"Halloo, old Sweetness!" he began to say; "what you up to? You look tired; been on the go ever since you left us last night? What you down here for, anyway? Oh, your old man's office, isn't it? Why, you're sick, boy!" he exclaimed, as he drew near. The smile left his face and a stern look came upon it. "Has he been kicking you out, or——"

Murgatroyd feebly raised one arm; his mouth opened, but he could only gasp.

"Damn him! I'll kick him out, if you say so!" continued Horace, between his teeth.

"Dead!" croaked Murgatroyd. "Killed; stabbed in the back!"

Horace put on his hat and stood still.

"Get up," he said, after a pause, "and come in."

He lifted the youth by the arm, noticing as he did so the blood on his hand. He led him into the passage and through the open door into the antechamber. After closing the door, he said in a low and gentle tone, "Look at me, my dear."

The other raised a haggard face. Horace gazed at him penetratingly. Murgatroyd never knew what his friend sought to determine by that gaze.

"It's good you came," he faltered out at length. "Oh, think of poor mother!"

"Do you mean that your father is murdered?" demanded Horace, steadily. "When was it?—just now? You didn't see anybody? Perhaps he killed himself."

"He's stabbed in the back. He's in there—just as I found him. He was warm

still, and I heard the back window slam. If I'd started right off I might have caught him, but I stopped to see—and the blood—he got through to the next street—so I ran to the front again for help, and you——"

"Yes, yes; I see. It's all right, and I'm damned glad I happened along. If it had been some fool, instead, there might— Is there a washstand here? Go and wash your hands. It's all right, Murgy. We've got to die, you know, and some of us have got to be killed. The stars do it all, and his time had come. Now let's go in and have a look, and then we'll get the police; they're a lot of asses, but it can't be helped. Brace up, my dear. I'm as big a fool as any of 'em. You ought to kick me if I got my deserts, but never mind! Come on!"

The Doctor was familiar with scenes of death, and of violence, as well. He made his examination quietly and coolly, so far as it could be done without disturbing the position of the body. Mr. Whiterduce had been struck from behind, the knife passing downward through the left lung, and probably penetrating the apex of the heart. It must have been a powerful blow, with a keen weapon. The weapon had been withdrawn,

and the murderer seemed to have left no obvious traces of himself. Horace Maydwell then examined the back window. The murderer had evidently run thither, on hearing Murgatroyd at the door, had got out, letting the sash fall behind him, and had dropped to the ground, a distance of about eight feet. His further course, as well as his identity, must be left for subsequent investigation to discover. The police must try their skill. "And I guess they'll have their hands full!" Horace remarked. "It looks pretty dark. Well, we'll see!"

There was a police station around the corner, and thither the Doctor went, deeming it better to lodge the information himself than to trust that office to Murgatroyd, who was not in a condition to make himself intelligible. If he, the boy's nearest friend, had for a moment suspected him of the deed it would not do to take chances with the police. The fact that Murgatroyd remained on guard in the antechamber would of itself go far to exonerate him should circumstances seem to indicate any sinister complications. Horace would doubtless have felt less solicitude had he been at this time aware of the details of his young friend's journey from his

house to the office, telling everyone he met on the way that he was going by appointment to meet his father.

Horace returned in ten minutes with a sergeant and a detective from the station. While these individuals were in the midst of their work two distinguished personages made their appearance—no other than Judge Hemynge, Whiterduce's confidential legal adviser, and Blackmer Risdon, of the *Constitution*.

"Whiterduce murdered!" exclaimed Risdon, in a tone that made the windows vibrate. "My friend Whiterduce — cut down like that! God in heaven, is nothing sacred in this life?"

"By the Lord, whoever did it shall hang for it!" cried the Judge, turning pale, with trembling lips. "No man's life is safe in these infernal anarchistic times! If they can kill Whiterduce, who's safe? They may take me next!"

"Don't let it worry you, Judge," said Horace, settling the glasses and fixing his eyes on the old gentleman. "These fellows don't care to bother with a man's man; they go for the man himself. Besides, we don't know yet that it wasn't some com-

mon thief. What put anarchists in your head?"

"Who are you, sir? And what the devil —ah! Ain't you Horace Maydwell?"

"Dr. Horace Maydwell is my name and profession, Judge. What about it?"

"Why, you're—you're the fellow that insulted——"

"Yes, I'm the fellow that pulled Whiterduce's nose in the club," said Horace, coming quite near, as the Judge backed into a corner. He spoke in a tone so low that it was audible to Hemynge only—the others being otherwise occupied. "And what I did to the master I'm ready to do to the man. But that boy there is my friend, and if you raise your voice so that he hears about it, now or later, I'll choke your cur's life out of you."

"I—I don't want any trouble with you in —in the house of death, sir; but no man can—I shall—you shall hear from me, sir! I shall——"

But the other, with an unpleasant laugh, snapped his fingers in front of the Judge's pallid face and turned away.

Meanwhile Risdon was questioning the police sergeant.

"Not a robbery, you say? Do you infer, then, a personal——"

"We can't say nothing definite yet, Mr. Risdon, and the less said publicly at present the better—as I needn't tell you, sir. It don't look to me like nothin' ordinary—that's all. There might be things stole—see? We'll have to get an inventory to make sure about that; but it ain't no common thief that gets behind a gentleman's chair, he sitting easy and unsuspectin' like—and jabs a knife into him afore he can turn around—see? Them two had been havin' a chat, confidential, as I might say; the fellow he gets up from that chair where he was a-sittin', and he just takes a turn past the back of Mr. Whiterduce's chair—see? And that's when the job was done, to my mind—right then and there, in the mid of a word, as it might be. There might 'a' been money, or dockyments, or what not, as he wanted, lyin' on the table; or there might not—see? If there was, why, we'll find it out; but if there wasn't—see?—why, then what I says is, this ain't no common thieving job, and what else it might be will appear at the proper time, Mr. Risdon, if you'll excuse me, sir, for keepin' my

mouth shut, which is the rules, as you know, sir."

"But you have your theory, eh? I can see that," returned the great editor insinuatingly.

"You can see a good deal further than into the middle of next week, then?" interposed Horace, with that disconcerting grin of his. "What you see is a newspaper 'scoop,' I guess! But if my friend the sergeant knows his business, and which side his bread's buttered, he'll let you scoop in the lies to suit yourself."

Risdon raised his head like a lion accused of robbing hen-roosts, but, being a keen student of character, he at once perceived that the way to deal with this person was not to roar at him. On the other hand, he scented a possible source of information, and his diplomacy and insight were at once aroused to avail himself of it.

"Your animadversion on the press has too much justification, Mr.—ah—I beg your pardon——"

"Dr. Maydwell."

"Ah, Doctor, I am always glad to meet men of your profession. My own father was a physician. We know we're on safe

ground with you. I was about to say that my inquiries were made, not with the motive you suppose, which my affectionate respect for our deceased friend would forbid in any case——"

"It may be as well to tell you that there was not much affection lost between your deceased friend and me," Horace put in. "If there was any respect it was all on one side."

The Titan of the press was disconcerted for a moment. He took another look at his interlocutor and resumed, in another tone:

"We will agree to differ there, then. I am well aware that my friend had enemies. But you and I, sir, as men of the world, may meet on the common ground of abhorrence of lawless violence, and desire to see outrage brought home to its perpetrators. Now, there came into my possession this morning a letter which, though anonymous, bids fair, in view of what has occurred——"

"Excuse me, Mr. Risdon," said Horace, "I'm a plain man and understand plain talk. All that long language is wasted on me. You're from Maine, ain't you? If you can remember any of the short words they use in the backwoods up there, we'll get on better."

Blackmer Risdon had his cue now, and being really a man of pith under all his disguises, he swung his shoulders, and gave a loose rein to the real contents of himself.

"By God, Doctor, you're the sort of huckleberry it does me good to run up against! I want to see more of you. Get around and dine with me to-night—just you and me—and I'll see if I can't get in under your guard and give you as good as you send. There's my address. Now, you come! I don't give a damn who or what you hate or you like, but if you don't like me before I'm done with you I'll know why! I guess you'll find I'm not far off some of your notions, though I do run a newspaper for money and talk through my hat to fellows who talk through theirs. Now see here. What do you say to that?"

He put a piece of letter-paper in the other's hand. It had some writing on it—a conventional business script, such as is written by a hundred thousand commercial scribes—and was to this effect:

"MR. RISDON, *Constitution*—You attended a birthday dinner this evening. Before long you may meet at the same place

again for a different sort of ceremony. In the midst of life we are in death. Some men outlive their usefulness. Unless they can give satisfactory guarantees, they have to go. Your friend has not done so up to now. I have no hand in this business, but I know of it. If you don't understand what I mean, perhaps Judge Hemynge will. If anything is going to be done, it had better be done quick. So no more at present from yours truly,

"ONE OF THE BOYS.

"November 13th."

"If it was meant to save his life, it came too late, and if not I see no use in writing it," observed Horace, handing it back. "I'm not the detective in this case. Give it to the police."

"So, you swear by the police, don't you!" returned Risdon, tilting his eyebrow. "Let's talk sense. This thing means an organization, don't it? I showed it to Hemynge this morning. He was Whiterduce's inside man. The Judge is a smart man and a friend of mine; but what he said was, 'Just another piece of anonymous tomfoolery: get 'em every mail: it'll work out into a dodge to get money—you'll see.' 'But

it's an organization,' I said. 'Organization be damned!' says he; 'if it was an organization, then Whiterduce must be in it, mustn't he? And is it likely that Whiterduce would be in with a gang that murders its members when they don't pony up right?' That's the way the Judge put it. Now, you see, he was wrong on his first count—that it was only a bluff for cash: he wouldn't have come down here this morning, only I made him; for when the young chap there told us his father was to be at his office to-day, I put this and that together, and didn't like the look of it. Now what I say is, if the Judge was wrong on one count, he may not have been right on the other. Do you get my point? I've seen a good deal of Whiterduce myself, and I've got something of a nose for human nature; and my totting-up of him was—'Still water runs deep!' You might go in and out with him, and pass the time of day, year out and year in, and yet never once get the ghost of a squint at what was at the bottom of the man's mind. And unless you was pretty damned smart you wouldn't so much as get to suspect that there was anything at the bottom of his mind to get a squint at! Well, now, Hemynge is all

right, and so are the police; but maybe Whiterduce was a touch beyond 'em. And my idea is," added the editor, taking out a paper of chewing tobacco, offering it to Horace, who declined it, and then detaching a quid for himself, "that there are resources at the disposal of a newspaper that lay over anything else in the world; I believe there's the biggest sort of a big thing behind this murder. I say such things have no business in a country like this; and by God, sir, if I have life and means I'm going to follow it up and hunt it down—let the stripes fall on whom they may! You may kick at American aristocracy, Dr. Maydwell, and you may say that politics are rotten, and the church a fraud, and the municipal offices dens of pickpockets; and you may know that the cost of the trimming on a society woman's dress would keep a slum family in bang-up style for a year; and you may conclude from all that that there can't be anything very bad in what goes against such things, whether they're legal or whether they ain't; and you may have personally hated the man who was killed here an hour ago—I remember you now, and that affair at the club—and to end up, you may say that all I'm after is to boom

my circulation and put money in my pocket. Those may be your opinions, and I may go with you as to most of 'em, though if you're such a donkey as to believe that a man like me can have no motive but a base one in working out this job, then I don't give a squirt of tobacco juice for you and fifty like you! But that ain't the way I size you up; I credit you with brains to see that whatever organization or conspiracy was behind this murder, means no help to the poor, nor lift to labor, nor cleanness and honesty anywhere; what those men are after is money and power, and that means, for such men, robbery and terrorism. And I guess you have a heart in you that——"

"Look here, Blackmer," said Judge Hemynge, coming behind him and plucking him by the sleeve, "I'm off. They've sent for the coroner, and as I have no evidence to offer, and feel pretty seedy anyhow, I'm going to get a drink. Unless you mean to put in that scrap of paper of yours, you'd better come along."

"Shall I see you this evening, Doctor?" asked Risdon, taking up his hat from the chair beside which he had been standing, and putting forth his hand to grasp the other's.

"Come to my office after you've dined and I'll see you," replied Horace, coldly; "I don't dine out. You'll find me in the Directory. Good-morning."

All this time Murgatroyd had been sitting in a corner, with his elbow on a small table, staring at nothing and apparently inattentive to what was going on. If the policeman or the detective asked him a question, he waited a moment or two, and then answered it intelligently, relapsing immediately into his brown study. Occasionally he would compress his temples between the thumb and fingers of his right hand. You would have said, to look at him, that he had had a stunning fall and was dully waiting for his wits to come back to him. Horace came up, when the Judge and the editor had gone, and half sat on the little table, putting his arm on the other's shoulder. "Keep a grip on yourself, you know," said he.

"It's poor mother," answered the young man, in a heavy tone. "I've got to tell her. Poor mother!"

"Say, my dear, each fellow's own troubles are enough for him. It's no use your doing other folks' worrying. Maybe she'll stand it better than you think."

"She sent him her dearest love—I was to mind not forget to tell him, and that he was to come home soon—she wanted him, and that she was very happy, and we all would be happier and happier right along now. She kissed me—she was so sweet and lovely I pretty near cried, I guess—and I've got to go home and tell her—I shall have to say——"

He stopped and resumed his blank attitude.

Horace was surprised. He thought he had good reason to believe that there was no love lost between this married pair. But there was evidently reason for the boy's thinking otherwise.

"I'll go home with you, Murgy," he said, presently. "We'll go together, as soon as these duffers are through. I'll stay by you, my boy."

"But I must tell," he answered, looking up. "I'm the head of the house now; I must do it."

"Yes, yes; to be sure. And you'll take as good care of her as anybody could—better. Keep your grit—that's the way. And count on me, when you want me, every time."

The coroner came at length, the necessary

inquiries were made and answered and the permit given. Murgatroyd could now go home. He accepted Horace's companionship, but was depressed and taciturn. "I'm glad of one thing — she'll know what he wanted and I can have it done," was one of his observations. "I can do what I'm told — even fools can do that. I'm the head, but she'll be the brains."

"Well, I believe she's a good woman," said Horace.

"I'll be her servant all my life," rejoined the young man. "All I hope is, she won't want me to—to marry. I'd rather stay with her than marry the best other woman in the world. I know Miss Sharingbourne is very nice—ever so much more so than I need—but I want my mother; seems to me, to make her happy, even I could become a decent sort of fellow."

"You've got some friends who think you're pretty decent as you are already."

Murgatroyd answered only with a big sigh. He was evidently struggling to accommodate his hitherto boyish mind to the idea of manly responsibilities, and, with the simplicity natural to him, was trusting to his love for his mother to help him out. His

friend smiled to himself at the pathos of this conception. The idea of carrying on the Whiterduce policy on the basis of filial affection was at least a novelty. To be developed into a man of the world by the inspiration of a mother's kiss! But what perplexed Horace as much as anything else was this enshrining of Mrs. Whiterduce in the chief place in Murgatroyd's heart. He had hardly ever mentioned her before; and, as has been already intimated, the Doctor had gathered from the unconscious revelations of the lady herself, in her feverish delirium, hints enough to show that she had never recognized Murgatroyd as her own son. He was forced to conclude that the sudden flowering of this love and devotion must be due to the violent emotional shock of Whiterduce's death, causing the youth to throw himself into imaginative sympathy with the widow. Horace himself, it need hardly be added, was far from anticipating that the news they were carrying to the lady would have anything like such an effect upon her as his companion looked for. She would regard it, he thought, as a blessing, conveyed, no doubt, in a very objectionable manner, but an essential blessing all the

same. Thus did he furnish another illustration of the impotence of human sagacity to interpret one's fellow-creatures aright. Love is the only true interpreter; and even love is, in human beings, so mingled with personal shortcomings that its vision is often blurred.

As they went up the steps of the house Murgatroyd, instead of appearing more agitated, became calmer. It was that strange strength which is begotten of the obliteration of selfish feeling in concern for another.

"Stay downstairs, please," he said to his friend. "I must go up to her alone."

Sally Wintle opened the door, the smile with which she greeted Murgatroyd disappearing in an expression of decorous formality as she observed the stranger. "Is my mother in her room?" asked Murgatroyd.

"Yes, sir; I called her for lunch half an hour ago, but she said she'd wait for you. Will I put another plate, sir?"

"No," interposed Maydwell; "I shan't be long. Go up, my boy; I'll look out for myself."

Murgatroyd went upstairs, and for some minutes Horace remained gazing absently at a fine engraving of Raphael's "Transfigu-

ration," which hung in the hall. By and by he heard Murgatroyd's voice calling him from the top of the stairs in a singular, hushed tone, "Horace! Horace!"

"Yes," said he, and ran up. The other met him on the landing and grasped his hand in a tremulous grip.

"It breaks my heart," he said, the words seeming to be shaken out of him. "But oh! I'm glad—I'm glad!"

Horace stood, uncomprehending. After a pause the other, still keeping hold of his hand, drew him into a room to the left.

It was Mrs. Whiterduce's boudoir. Horace saw the beautiful, stately woman seated in a low arm-chair, beside a little writing-table of inlaid wood. She had opened the drawer, and there were in her lap some old photographs. They were likenesses of her friends of earlier days, taken before the time of her marriage. Her hand held one of Pynchepole Whiterduce as a young man of thirty—the gift of the lover to his mistress. Her head, with its slightly silvered hair, reclined against the cushion at the back of the chair; and the light from the window, falling gently on her face through the gauze

curtain, showed that she smiled, as one who dwells on happy memories.

But she did not stir nor betray consciousness of the presence of the stranger. Her pleasant revery was too profound.

The two men moved slowly up to her. The physician bent forward; he touched her wrist with his finger.

"I might have thought of this," he said. "When I attended her three years ago, I examined her heart, and knew that she would be liable to go off at any moment, especially after any strong excitement or emotion. But had you told her?—did she know?"

"No, that's why I'm so glad. She never knew; she never will now. They'll always be happy together now. It's the best thing in the world; but I loved her so—I——"

His voice broke, and he said no more.

"This is a queer old world," Horace kept repeating to himself as he sauntered slowly home that evening, his hat in his hand—"a queer old world! I wonder what'll come of it!"

CHAPTER IX

NATURE AND EDUCATION

Some eighteen months after the death of Mr. and Mrs. Whiterduce there was again a group of elegant idlers in the smoking-room of the St. Quentin Club.

During the interval, Aubert Frewin, the artist, had been in Europe, for some or all of the purposes that have led our men of paint and canvas thither since the epoch of Benjamin West. He had reappeared in the club for the first time since his return, on this particular afternoon—to tell the truth, he landed at nine o'clock, and was in the midst of his fellow-members by four. He was richly encrusted with foreign æsthetic culture, and his habits of abstraction and other idiosyncrasies had become softened by a mellowing atmosphere of worldly experience. He behaved with great urbanity to his old comrades, but found difficulty in wholly disguising the fact that these haunts of his youth

struck him as being just a trifle provincial. He said the Arts Club, in London, wasn't half a bad place; you met fellows there who knew a thing or two about painting. Paris, Vienna, Venice, Florence, Rome, he had found many agreeable features in all these places. He did not indorse the dogmas of the more recent apostles of art. "After all, you know, those old chaps were the great men; they knew what they were about." The club listened to this sort of thing for a season with tolerable grace; then Stukely Poyntell said, "Is this to be a series of lectures, or are we to get it all at once?"

Aubert smiled. "Ah, Stukely, same old boy! Well, what's been doing here? Anything new?"

"The *Constitution* has a circulation of four hundred thousand copies, *bona-fide* sales, exclusive of returns, as may be seen by an examination of the books, which are open to public inspection, if the sworn affidavits of eminent and impartial business men, published in the second column of the editorial page, should prove insufficient to satisfy advertisers and readers," said Verinder Vyse, making movements with his right arm as though he were turning a crank.

"Yes; its rejection of Vyse's last novel, though offered free of charge, gave it an immense boom," added Poyntell.

"That, and its amateur detective work on the great Whiterduce murder case," said Will Walwine, a gentleman of coaching and poloing proclivities, with short-cropped hair, a high-featured and high-colored countenance, an imposing bust, a pinched-in waist and gaiters. He imparted to whatever he uttered the air and tone of an excellent jest or a telling epigram, though nothing of such matters was discoverable in the utterances themselves.

"Aurelia Estengrewe has become a priestess of Isis, and has gone to India with our last visiting Mahatma," said Vyse. "Hannah has written a cookery book, Sabina is a woman's suffrage advocate and speaks from the platform, and Mrs. Jellicoe, after inheriting another million from her brother in San Francisco, has been married to the Rev. Christopher Plukerose Agabag."

"Mrs. Dorothy Tiptoft, at the age of ninety-two, was thrown from her carriage in the Park and broke her leg," said Poyntell. "But she recovered and now walks quite well with a crutch."

"Devereux Scaramanga has written and scored a great American opera, 'Pocahontas,' and——"

"Yes, by Jove!" interrupted Will Walwine, warmly; "and there's a bang-up little piece has come out and taken the part—Letty Valentine. She's a pupil of—what is that chap's name?—and old Turlbut, the impresario, pays her four thousand a week."

"By the way, how was it about that murder business?" Frewin inquired. "When I left they'd only just got started on it."

"Well, the hanging isn't in sight yet—you're in plenty of time for that," said Stukely Poyntell. "But Risdon is still on the trail. To do him justice (though he is my employer), he has done a wonderful business with that thing. He's brought the crime home to at least four prominent secret organizations, incidentally giving a history of each, with interviews with its prominent members, and has invented as many more, the details about which are even more bloody and harrowing."

"The real ones, of course, pay him for writing them up," said Vyse, "but the others are sheer creations of genius and make me jealous. Husbands and wives in society

watch each other at the breakfast-table, ready to dodge bombs; and people get insured against death by poisoning every time they attend an afternoon tea. That's the reason the Mahatma eloped with Aurelia—the new fad put his little boom in the soup."

"Any more murders?"

"No; that's the weak point of the scheme. I told Ridson his circulation depended upon it, but he has his limitations. When I talk about an aristocratic Jack the Ripper, though, the poor man sighs and gnaws his chewing tobacco."

"What's become of Murgy?"

"Ah! now you have touched upon the really pregnant marvel of the day," replied the novelist. "You know the sort of bumpkin he was—that we thought he was, rather? We were wrong! There were depths, boy, that our little plummets had never sounded. Here's a young cub, fresh from school, with shining morning face, of whose talent for after-dinner oratory you, I think, have heard a specimen; a cabbage-head who takes all your jokes for earnest, but splutters with giggles if a lady spills the salt or a servant stumbles while bringing in the tea-tray; this animal—this sucking Caliban—I say, suddenly

tumbles into an unencumbered inheritance of—let us be grossly moderate and call it ten millions. This trifling douceur is his, absolutely, by will, and (practically) in cash, to do with precisely as he pleases. Guess, now, an thou canst, what he doth with these sudden riches. Spendeth he you a million on gaudy viands and potent sack; another on a harem in comparison whereto that of Solomon was but as a young ladies' private boarding-school; a third on haughty palaces, wherein it skilleth him not to dwell; a fourth in chariots and steeds; a fifth and sixth in losing bets on the latter to Walwine and his like, and the remainder in furnishing forth a loathly crew of flatterers, sycophants, lick spittles, bravos, and dead-beats in general? Doeth he these things or any of them? Friend, I tell thee nay. Oh! James, ask the gentlemen what they'll take."

"A drop of absinthe for me, James," said Frewin.

The glances of Poyntell and Vyse met over his head.

"Fetch me a noggin of prussic acid and arsenic," said the former. "I do find myself somewhat feeble to-day!"

"You really ought to try and ease off on

those strong tipples, though, Stuke, my boy," said Vyse. "You'll end by regretting it. James, bring me a pint of brandy and laudanum mixed, with just a dash of red pepper. I learned to drink that, my dear Mr. Frewin, during my residence abroad, and find it agrees with me wonderfully. As for Walwine, he still is faithful to his good old mulled ammonia, ain't you, Wal? And, really, for a steady day and night stand-by I don't know that one could do better."

Frewin was fain to grin; he colored at the delicate rebuke, but took it gracefully. "This is my treat, boys," he said, "and it's fizz. Name your brand. Mumm it is, James. Now, my romantic improvisator, resume your fascinating tale."

"Praise from Sir Aubert is praise indeed. Where were we? Well, you know, instead of all the above, the man has come out as correct as Hoyle and as stiff as Walwine's stays. He avoids *faux pas* by saying little, or less, never taking a joke or making one, and studying the arts and sciences eight hours a day, under all the leading professors — astronomy to-day, history to-morrow, chemistry on Thursday, fencing Friday, sociology and law on Saturday, and on Sunday

he listens to disputations between rival doctors of theology. He'll end as the Francis Bacon of the nineteenth century. But the crisp of the joke is his search, not for the Philosopher's Stone, but for the policy and procedure of the late esteemed and tragic Pynchepole."

"As how?"

"Why, on looking into the records of revenue and expenditure, he made the discovery that a good fifty per cent. of the latter, during the last ten or fifteen years, had disappeared without any record at all! Putting the total income of the estate at, say, five hundred thousand, here's two hundred and fifty thousand spent each twelvemonth on nobody can find out what! Of course one might make certain guesses about at least a fraction of it, if Pynchepole had been a certain kind of man; but it's notorious that he was never anything of the sort; the blameless tenor of his daily life was known to all men; his temperament and constitution alike forbade excesses; and, as a matter of fact, from the day he entered college to the hour of his decease he was never detected in any species of dissipation or wanton extravagance. On the other hand, his legiti-

mate expenses were on a grand scale, and his charities are said to have been regal—I believe that was the *Constitution's* word, wasn't it, Stuke? The money he spent openly, in short, covers about every avenue of expenditure that ingenuity can imagine; and yet there is that deficit of a quarter of a million annually staring you in the face. It used to be supposed, while he was alive, that he added his superfluous income to his invested capital; but it is now plain that he never did anything of the kind. One of the most entertaining of the late Lord Lytton's romances is called 'What Will He Do with It?' But this unwritten tale of 'What Did He Do with It?' leaves it at the post and romps in hands down, as Walwine would say."

"Humph!" muttered Frewin, staring at the toe of his boot. "Maybe the right man to solve the riddle would be he who stuck the knife into poor Pynchepole's back."

"Why mightn't he have buried it, the way that pirate chap did—Kidd?" suggested Walwine.

Much to his surprise and gratification—for he had not realized that he was being waggish—this sally elicited a laugh.

"Come to think of it, I heard that Pynchepole had had his cellar enlarged about a dozen years ago," said Poyntell. "Shouldn't wonder if you'd hit it, Wal. Propose to tell Murgy the secret on condition he divvies with you."

"Hadn't old Hemynge—where is Hemynge, by the bye?—hadn't he anything to say about it?" Frewin asked.

"Hemynge, I regret to say, is no longer in it," said Poyntell.

"Dead?"

"Not physically. We don't know exactly what happened; but Murgy seems to have become dissatisfied with him for some reason, and fired him—he used to be Pynchepole's attorney-general, you know. The impetus of his expulsion seems to have possessed such momentum that the Judge vanished beyond the limits of polite knowledge. 'Tis said that Mrs. Tiptoft sends him ten dollars a week, wherever he is, for old times' sake."

"So Murgy is trying to find out how his father got rid of his income, is he? What's his object?"

"My dear boy," said Vyse, "his object is to maintain the reputation of the Whiter-

duces. And here the tale becomes pathetic. Nobody was ever so wise, you remember, as somebody or other looked; and so, nobody ever deserved such a reputation as the Whiterduces enjoyed. But poor Murgy, in his innocence, takes it all au grand sérieux, and really believes that he has to compete against an ancestry of demigods. He is persuaded that his father had some divine use for all that money, and he will never rest till he finds what it was, and can quiet his conscience by directing the golden stream along the same channel. He refuses to see the rather obvious fact that if the said money had been applied to any laudable or even mentionable purpose, the beneficiaries of it would long since have declared themselves. Or possibly he thinks that it was dispensed to these hypothetical parties with such exquisite delicacy that they never discovered whence it came. Anyway, there it is, and meanwhile, of course, the Whiterduce capital is rolling up, and Plutus only knows what the end will be."

"Well, I give it up. Where's Stepyngstone? has he been retired, too?"

"No, but Mrs. S. has gone daft, her first overt demonstration being to spring an ac-

tion for divorce on him. Her complaint shows him up in such colors as would make Don Juan a mere pithless schoolboy in comparison. But it turned out, before it had got further than the drawing up of the affidavits, that she had no witnesses and no co-respondents that could be found on earth, so some doctors sat upon her, and she is now in a private establishment."

"The poor old General!"

"But do you appreciate the real sadness of his condition?" asked Poyntell. "It was not so much being bereft of his wife that made him downcast, as the smiling recognition on the part of all who knew him that her charges against him could by no possibility be true. It is one thing to vindicate one's innocence in the teeth of grave and plausible suspicion; it is quite another to find it taken for granted on the ground of one's incapacity for guilt. The General was, at first, secretly flattered by the magnificent scale of his wife's accusations. He seemed to be saying: 'Of course, morally, I'm utterly incapable of such enormities; but you see what a devil of a fellow I could be if I chose!' But wherever he went he was greeted with broad smiles and compassionate

clappings on the back, and such remarks as, 'Never mind, Stepyngstone, old man; we might have believed you poisoned your mother, or stole the club spoons, or ate roast baby for supper—anything in reason, you know—but when it comes to a thing like this, dear old boy, why, you mustn't let it worry you a single moment! You might as well get nervous about a railway accident that occurred forty years ago—forty years ago, my dear Step.' That was the sort of encouragement that corroded the General's heroic soul, and we don't see his fine old legs stalking round here so often as we used to do."

"Well, you're a sweet, charitable lot," observed Frewin, getting up and stretching himself. "I only hope you'll all die before I do!" And with that he lounged off.

CHAPTER X

AN ITALIAN INTERLUDE

There was a house of modest pretensions, on a quiet but accessible street, which was kept as an Italian restaurant. A bust of Garibaldi stood between the two end windows, and there were chromos of Victor Emmanuel, Humbert and his pretty Queen, the Pope, and some less world-famed personages distributed about the walls. The house was simply a dwelling of the style of a generation ago, modified into an eating-place; some doorways had been enlarged, a loggia built out over the back yard, and a large dumb-waiter shaft constructed to communicate with the first two floors. The proprietor, Signor Gaetano, sat on a high stool at a desk at the juncture of the front and rear rooms; he was quick and nervous as a lizard, and had the national gift for gesture, but was not in other respects of the conventional Italian type; he was blond, pale, rather bald, in disposition benign and conciliating,

most courteous to all guests, and tenderly enthusiastic in his greetings to those of old standing. He was obviously under subjection to an imposing wife, with curly yellow hair, a costly complexion, and a Junonian bust. The waiters were numerous and diligent, and grateful for small tips; the viands were well cooked and the dishes (at 50 cents a head) interminable, with plenty of macaroni, salad and olives, and straw-covered wine-flasks with round bellies and slim necks, evolving red Chianti with an agreeable blobbing sound. Bread was abundant and excellent, and apparently costless; there were on every table tall glasses containing celery, and others holding long, crisp sticks of a sort of biscuit, to be devoured between courses. After the regular dinner, there were little cups of black coffee, with cognac to pour over your sugar and set fire to; and then you lit a cigarette, for the ladies permitted it, and occasionally even took a whiff themselves. No one ever got up discontented from Signor Gaetano's tables; and there was a constant buzz of amicable but never uproarious conversation; and everybody had the air of being more or less acquainted with everybody else.

It is pleasant, once in a while, to get a good dinner without paying for it, not only in twice the fair amount of coin of the realm, but likewise in a rigid respectability of demeanor, a bullying or rapacious waiter, and an insulting desk clerk. After dining once at Signor Gaetano's you made up your mind to go there often, but you seldom carried out your resolution, because the place was a little out of the way, and the persons with whom you proposed to dine were usually headed in some other direction. But there were some whose pliant circumstances or valiant souls enabled them to do as they liked, and of these were Horace Maydwell, Polydore Scamell, and, less frequently, Gabriel Negus.

On a lovely evening in June—the time of year when we first begin to stop being morose about late frosts and snow flurries—the triumvirate met at Gaetano's by appointment, and with them a distinguished and enchanting companion—no less than the popular prima donna, Letitia Valentine. Letitia was now a great personage in the world's eye. The gilded youth of the city sighed for her to a dude; the princes of society sought her company at banquets of Sardanapalus; she

lived in a storm of flattery, flowers, jewels, and millinery, and nothing was too good for her. The little woman, with her wavy red hair, her dancing dark eyes, her radiant skin, her ravishing soprano, and her transcendent impudence, was making her hay while the sun shone, and took a liberal view of human nature and the proprieties. Yet she was neither reckless nor vicious. She knew the price of success as well as the value of it. She did not lose her head, and she even seemed to keep the mastery of her heart. Everyone who came near her had to pay heavily for the privilege, but no one was found to assert that he had been able to buy more than a pretty woman may frankly sell. Let us not be too credulous, but let us not swerve from that Charybdis into the Scylla of cynicism.

Meanwhile one thing is certain—Letitia's relations with her three friends had not been altered by her prosperity by so much as the twitter of a frog's eyelash, as Polydore expressed it. She knew to whose schooling it was that she owed her elevation, and she had the greatness of soul to choose the gold of sterling friendship to any other kind. Her hosts of this evening never knew what glit-

tering worship she had cast aside for the sake of this Sunday spree in the obscure little restaurant, and Letitia never so much as thought of telling them. She threw herself into the moment with her characteristic vigor, and rejoiced with childlike glee that no one, except her entertainers, recognized her, or knew where she was. She had given the slip even to her duenna, for the vicarious monopoly of whose formidable virtues she paid $20 a week.

They got a secluded table in a corner of the loggia, where the newly budded branches of an elm-tree screened them from back windows, and where Letitia could present her back—more lively and expressive than the fronts of most women—to such of the public as might find their way to the other loggia tables. She was dressed in what she called a plain black frock; perhaps it was the woman inside it that made it seem like the last triumph of Parisian genius; and the little black bonnet, with its crisp white ruche, made a frame for her brilliant and mischievous little visage that added a tang to it like that of kisses stolen in church. The air was so soft and still that even Polydore (who watched over her with the solicitude of a

one-chicken hen) could pretend no need of safeguards for her invaluable glottis.

"Why, Horace, if you don't look like one of those college football players with all that hair!" exclaimed she. "Doesn't it bother you getting into your eyes? Do you comb it yourself, or do you keep a maid?"

"The poet says," remarked Gabriel, "that 'Love lends a precious seeing to the eye.' Guess you must be—pretty—far—gone on Horace. Wish you'd take a look at my bank account, some day when you ain't busy; maybe you'd be able to see a balance!"

"She's making my fortune, though I don't let her know it," said Polydore. "I had three new applicants this week for me to make 'em sing like Letitia Valentine."

"Any of 'em any good?" asked Horace, munching a biscuit stick.

"One of 'em's got something like a voice, if she hadn't hurt it by the fool training she's had. She's a darned good-looking gal, but she belongs to that rotten swell set that think the sun rises to see them pick their teeth."

"Ain't you disgusting!" sighed Letitia, pensively. "What does a girl like that want with learning singing, anyway?"

"Oh, some yarn about wanting to be independent. The old folks are for having her marry some beggar she don't fancy, and she's got her eye on somebody else, I reckon, and wants to cut loose. It's none of my business, as long as she planks up her $5 an hour, but these kind of chaps that come lallygagging round engaged gals are mostly the ones that don't take much stock in spooning without it's stealing, too!"

"If it ain't an—indiscreet question, Poly, who—might—she be?" Gabriel inquired.

"She had a name as long as my leg. I forget—hold on, it'll be in my book!" and he began rooting in his many voluminous pockets.

Meanwhile Horace, who in some respects was uncomfortably fastidious, was wiping his plate with his napkin and scrutinizing it sidelong to detect traces of unauthorized matter. He explained to Letitia, who expressed a curiosity on the subject, that he and Gaetano were close friends, and that he had stipulated for this privilege, in return for which he brought angels like herself to glorify the restaurant.

"Sharingbourne — that's what she calls herself," Polydore announced, lifting his nose

from the pages of the notebook in which he had buried it. "Isabella Sharingbourne."

Horace dropped his plate and looked up. "Why, she's Murgy's girl!" said he.

"Murgy's girl? My little Murgy's, that I'm keeping to settle down with in my old age? If any girl meddles with him I'll bite her!" exclaimed Letitia, looking fierce, like a tom-tit threatened by a sparrow.

"But Poly says she's going to—shake—Murgy and take up with—t'other chap; so, if you've no other—use—for it, I'd like that—bite—myself!" drawled Gabriel.

The prima donna went on without noticing this gallantry. "It's like her impudence, too, to prefer somebody else to my Murgy! Good-looking, is she?—she'll look like the tattooed woman in the dime museum when I'm through with her!"

"I'd give a lock of my hair to be sure you were right about that, Poly," said Horace, rubbing his eyeglasses with his handkerchief. "Who is the other fellow?"

Polydore shook his head.

Suddenly Letitia smote her little palms together and half jumped from her chair.

"I'll bet my garters I know!" cried she. "Tell me, Poly—ain't the Sharingbourne

girl tall, with dark hair, and carries herself like this—as if the Lord's earth ought to be sugar-coated before she'd put her foot on it?"

"I guess you've spotted her, my love," said Polydore, with a grin, for the actress's caricature of Isabella's coolly confident demeanor was masterly.

"Well, then, boys," she continued, "the other fellow, if you please, is nobody else but that black-eyed, long-haired gawk that wrote my opera—Dev Scaramanga himself! Ah, didn't I see 'em together in the stage box at rehearsal one day! Dev Scaramanga! —I think I know him—just a little bit! And I see her game! Throw over Murgy and his millions? Not much! She means to have her cake and eat it, too. Oh! I don't mind a little larking myself, but I play fair—I don't stack the cards—I don't believe in singing two duets at the same time! Well, now, you hear me say that Miss Isabella don't marry Murgy—mind, you hear me say it! And you needn't screw up that elephant's trunk of yours, Master Poly. I can do without Murgy, and his money, too. But I like him, same as I like all of you fellows, and he shan't be made a fool of—you hear me?"

These sentiments met with general ap-

plause. "Good for the little woman!" exclaimed Horace; "she's a prima donna in other ways besides singing. We'll break Murgy's nasty engagement off!"

"Strikes me it's been a—little—mite—long already," remarked the astrologer.

"Get her birthday date, Poly," said Letitia, "and then Gabe can settle the whole thing!"

"You can get at hers, pretty close, from Murgy's, can't you, Gabe?" asked Polydore.

"Well," returned the soothsayer, chewing meditatively on a piece of stewed chicken, "I might make a—stagger at it. Let's see—yes—well—I tell you what, boys—it looks to me now, as if she'd pretty—near—get—him!"

For once, Horace opposed his friend. "Letty's as big a star as any of 'em," said he, "and her aspect is favorable to the native. We'll have to count her in!"

Gabriel contemplated Horace, with his head tipped over to one side. "There's one funny thing about Murgy's horoscope," said he; "I noticed it, first time I cast it. He'd ought to have died when he was about seven weeks old; how he came to live

through it is what I—never—could—understand!"

"Oh, I guess astrology ain't everything," Letitia declared.

"That was about the cutest thing you ever said, Gabe," Horace observed at the same moment.

The two men exchanged a peculiar look. "I thought it might be that way," Gabriel said, as if to himself, finishing his chicken and pouring out a glass of wine.

"I'll tell you by and by," said Horace, taking an opportunity when Letitia and Polydore were engaged over the upsetting of a salt-cellar. Gabriel assented with a movement of the eyebrows, and the waiter came in with the salad. Then Signor Gaetano appeared, to pass the compliments of the evening.

"How's business, Illustrissimo?" Horace asked.

"Ah, Eccellenza! She come and she go! We make-a as we can! New faces—old faces; but the old are best, non e vero?"

"That's according to how they pay up, ain't it?" said the sordid Polydore.

The Signor's facile shoulders rose. "Ze mon' eez necessar', oh, si! ma—Santo Dia-

volo ! I not-a like zome face more as I like zeir mon'. Eef il Signor Horatio geev him ze pain to teep his chair—so—mille grazie !—he zee ze two signori at ze table zrou ze window ; questi ! signori, zey pay zeir mon', zey make-a no trouble ; but I no like-a, no trust-a, no want-a."

Horace, tilting back his chair, had caught a glimpse of two men, an old and a middle-aged one, conferring deeply over their cheese and celery. He righted his chair with a thump. "How long have they been coming here ?" he asked.

"One week—two week—chi lo sa ! Eef ze signori air of Eccellenza's acquaintance——"

"Caro mio, we doctors know everybody, but we don't always recognize 'em—capite ? Send us some cigarettes, there's a dear, and present our compliments to la bella Signorina, la vostra sposa. That's about all the Italian I know, old boy ; buona sera—addio !"

Slowly the rosy flood ebbed in the round-bellied flask ; it is astonishing how much these flasks hold, after you make sure they are empty ! The four friends looked amiably upon one another, smiling out of mere mutual good-will. Polydore, by the aid of

a napkin and three fingers, illustrated in excruciating pantomime the miseries of "Gaetano at home;" time, a hot July night; mosquitoes in the air, fleas in the bed. The spectators rocked with laughter at the amazing verisimilitude of the scratchings, tossings, and frenzies of the pigmy sufferer. Then Gabriel, who was an accomplished magician, as well as soothsayer, borrowed a pin from Letitia, and after making it pass through a bewildering series of adventures and metamorphoses, finally conjured it through the table into an empty wine-glass held underneath by Letitia herself. The glass upon examination was found to contain, not the pin, but a beautiful little gold enamelled Egyptian divinity, a unique ancient talisman and protection against all evil chance. Under Gabriel's directions Letitia pressed a concealed spring, the divinity opened down the back, and out fell a little roll of parchment, on which was a miniature drawing of the prima donna's horoscope, with the compliments of the Triumvirate!

"Well," said she, with an unusual liquidness in her voice and her eyes, "it's the sweetest thing I ever saw, except you, and Horace, and Poly — and poor Murgy!"

And she hastily dried her eyes with her handkerchief, laughed absurdly, kissed the divinity (with a glance at the three friendly faces which made each feel that he had been made partaker of the salute), and finally put it in her bosom, at which there was a general sentimental sigh!

"Come, Horace, get a move on yourself!" then said Polydore. "Do something to amuse the lady."

"I'm a doctor; all I can do is to cure her when she gets out of order. But the talisman will prevent that—eh, my dear?"

"I'll be sick on purpose sooner than not have you cure me," said she; "just wait till my season's over and you'll see!"

Horace's eyes met hers for a moment; she colored and he smiled.

They all sat quiet for a while, enjoying the soft air and the gathering night. At last Polydore, who never kept silent long, entered into a discussion with Letitia on some professional topic, and then Gabriel and Horace, on the other side of the table, got their heads together and conversed in murmurs.

"Yes, I guess it must be something that way," said Gabriel, after a while. "But

the will's all right, ain't it?—the boy gets the property, whoever he is?"

Horace nodded. "He's the heir, whatever happens."

"But he doesn't suspect that—little—irregularity in his parentage, eh?"

"No, and that's what queers the whole thing!" muttered the other, between his teeth. "If he knew, I'd have my hands free and could make things hum. But neither I nor any of the other people that know it dare tell him; and so everything's tied up."

"You—daren't—tell him! Come, that's something new, to see you scared! What's the trouble?"

"Well, it's this way. For some reason—I don't know what—he got the idea, somewhere about the time they both died, that his father and mother—as he thought them—were about the best folks living. I've nothing against Mrs. Whiterduce; I expect she may have been all right, though I know she didn't believe Murgy was her son, and did believe he was Pynchepole's by another mother. As for Pynchepole, he was a bigger rascal than most people know. I found him out a few years back, and you know

what happened in the club. He never followed it up, of course. I wish he had! He humbugged everybody, and toward the end he must have humbugged his wife, too; for, according to Murgy, she was sending him affectionate messages on the very day he was killed. Anyway, Murgy believes 'em both angels, and he has set out to make himself worthy of them, as he calls it. To do that he's been getting himself educated at a rate that nothing else would ever stir him to; he's making a man of himself; he's developing a mind and a character that I, for one, never thought was in him, and you know that nobody stands up for Murgy more than I do. I love the boy. One reason may be because I hated Pynchepole, but there's something natural and sweet about Murgy that just suits me, and I love him, and I'll do what I can for him any time. Now, you see, if I was to go to him and tell him he was no more a Whiterduce than I am, it would make him damned unhappy, and would do him harm. He'd feel as if he'd been made an orphan over again, and in a worse way than the first; and besides, he'd be humiliated before the world he lives in as having posed as a swell when really he

came out of the gutter. You see that, don't you?"

"Yes; but why need anybody else know?"

"Well, if there was no other reason, because Murgy'd tell them. He'd think it was his duty to relieve the family from the discredit of having such a boor as he thinks he is for the head of the house. He has no more egotism than a dog. But it would come out in other ways, anyhow. But that's another part of the yarn."

"And as for Miss Isabella, I suppose——"

"The first good bit of news I've heard was that about her to-night. Whether he ever learns who he is or not, a girl like that could only make him miserable. But if she really is carrying on with another fellow, that's a way out of one scrape, at least. It won't take me long to find out how that is."

"Well, now, look here, my dear," said Gabriel, slowly. "My idea is—I may be wrong, most likely am—but it does strike me that you're making a mountain out of a molehill. I like Murgy mighty well myself. Don't know just why, but I do.

Don't seem to be so much what comes out of him as that you feel there's something good in him—and natural, as you say. But I don't think he'd feel bad to know what he is. I think likely he'd feel relieved. As for his education and discipline, he'd keep what he's got already, I suppose, and maybe that's enough. And then again, a thing like that is always pretty sure to get out some time, and it's better it should come now, and come from you, than any other way or time. That's the way I look at it, and if you ain't got any reasons besides what you've told me, I should say don't get too fine strung over it, but sail right in and plump the whole thing right out on him."

"I haven't told you all the reasons, Gabe. I haven't touched the bottom reason of the lot. And this isn't the place for doing it. But you recollect, just now, Gaetano's speaking about two queer guests of his that he didn't like the looks of? Well, I took a look at 'em, and I know them both. One was that fellow Hemynge, whom Murgy found out in a defalcation about a year ago, but didn't prosecute because he'd been his father's man—that is, Pynchepole's; and

the other—lean over this way—the other was Murgy's real father——"

"You—don't—say so!"

"And Pynchepole's murderer!"

"Say, are you two old stupids singing each other to sleep over there?" came the clear warble of Letitia's voice. "Do you know what time it is? I'm going home; and all of you have got to come along with me, for I won't trust any of you alone! And we're going to walk, just like old times; so uncouple yourselves and come along!"

"All ready, most alluring of your sex!" returned Horace, with cheerful briskness. "Been waiting for you to get through spooning with Poly—that's all! He seems to be a Poly-gone on you, this evening! How's that for off-hand? If you catch cold going home and get a frog in your throat, he'll be your Poly-wog, won't he? If we all go home with you, though, it'll be a case of Poly-andry; but if you live in Poly-nesia, that'll be quite in the fashion. However, I don't want to have the mono-Poly of the conversation; I always practise what the French call Poly-tesse——"

"Death to punsters is my Poly-see!"

cried Letitia, snatching up the last of the biscuit sticks and plunging it in his breast; and as nothing could be devised worse than that, they sallied forth, laughing, pursued by the blessings of Gaetano.

CHAPTER XI

NEWS FOR MURGATROYD

The four friends walked slowly home, in a cluster, through the lovely night, which made its pure beauty felt even amidst the stone and iron of city streets. The shops were shut, the earth dark; the sky gained power. The people who passed them were shadowy and phantasmal. They felt themselves islanded in the vague sea of existence and enjoyed the fanciful solitude.

They left Letitia, at last, under the lean wing of her duenna, promising to appear all together in the stage box the next evening. "Good-night!" and the door closed. The three men strolled down to the corner. Polydore did one of his spectacular yawns. "I'm going to bed," he then said. "You fellows may see me home, if you like; if not, be good to yourselves!"

"You two are coming home with me," said Horace, in a voice altered from the idle

jocoseness of the half-hour passed. "We've got to have a talk, and now's a good time for it."

"I'm talked empty," objected Polydore.

"Your ears ain't any smaller than usual, though," remarked Gabriel, slipping his thick arm under the other's bony one; "so come along!"

"Oh, well, if there's anything up," said the prophet of the Method, and he resigned himself to the others.

Nevertheless, nothing was said for the next fifteen minutes, by the end of which they were within sight of Horace's dwelling. He occupied two or three rooms in the ground floor of an old apartment building. Someone who had been standing within the shadow of the doorway started forward as they drew near, and they recognized Murgatroyd.

"I'm glad you're come, I can tell you!" he exclaimed; "I've been waiting here two hours. They told me you were out, Horace, and I thought you must come back some time, so I stayed here."

"Why, you old pet, why didn't you wait inside?"

"Oh, I couldn't stand it! I had to be out-doors."

"What's the matter?—got the fever?"

"I've got something I must tell you—all of you. I'd have a fever if I didn't! You don't mind?"

"It's just what we're here for, I guess," said Horace, unlocking the door and slapping him on the shoulder. "Pile in there, the gang! Cabinet meeting, all hands!"

Horace's rooms were bare, dark, and empty of everything except necessary chairs and tables, and a few professional impedimenta, such as an electric machine. The doctor, when alone, lived in the realm of his own thoughts, and when he had company, he required no other decoration than their presence afforded.

But the furniture, what there was of it, was of a substantial sort: massive tables, cavernous easy-chairs. "If the boys want to drink," said Horace, "I can give you cherry brandy and water; and here's some old cigarettes—Cubans—that a poor devil gave me a year ago when I cured him of the horrors. Sit by, now, and stick your feet in the oven, as we used to say up in New Hampshire. Well, Murgy," he added, as he turned up

the gas, "we've not seen you for a dog's age. How are you? You look as fine as silk!"

Murgatroyd had not deteriorated in appearance since the day he attained his majority. His face was thinner, and his eyes had more light and purpose. The most noticeable alteration was in his mouth; it was more controlled, and the lips met in a firmer line. Before, he had looked younger than he was; he seemed older now. But he did not look happier; his boyish jollity was gone, and he had the air of supporting a burden. Just at present he was obviously worked up to an unusual pitch of feeling.

He had dropped into one of the big chairs at first, but the next moment he jumped up, took a turn about the room, and finally half sat on the edge of the table.

"You know that man, Hemynge," he said, addressing the words to Horace, and then including the others in his glance. "I told him to go, and that I never wanted to see him again. But I've seen him to-day, and he told me—something!"

"About a deficit of five dollars?" asked Polydore, archly.

"If what he said was true," went on the

young man, gathering energy as he spoke, "it will be as if I hadn't lived at all—was only like an actor in a play. Only I thought the play was real. But all I've thought and done and—it was a big sell—an infernal humbug!" he cried out, striking his fist on the table. "Here I am, and there's nothing left of me! I haven't anything to remember, or to think of, that I have any business with. I'm nothing—if what he told me is so!"

Horace and Gabriel exchanged a glance. Polydore said: "Then you may bet your bottom dollar, my boy, that he's been telling you a pack of damned lies."

"You haven't told us what he said yet, Murgy," said Gabriel, in his self-possessed, imperturbable drawl.

"He said, 'You're no Whiterduce. Mr. Whiterduce bought you of a woman on the street. Your father was a thieving Irish horse-jockey. Whiterduce paid him to keep quiet all his life, but you'll have to pay him now or he'll blow on you.' He said, 'I've got all the proofs you want,' and he showed me what he said were copies of papers. He said the real Whiterduce boy had died when he was a baby, but there had to be an heir,

so they got me. He said, 'Whiterduce could will you the property, but that's all he could do, and if you don't settle with me the whole story will go into the newspapers day after to-morrow.'"

"Well, for clear gall, Pa Hemynge takes the cake, don't he?" remarked Polydore, fetching his breath. All this was as new to him as to Murgatroyd, but it did not so much as occur to him to put credence in it.

"Did he tell you anything else, Murgy?" Horace asked quietly. "Any names, or anything more about Mr. Whiterduce?"

"No; that was the amount of it. Then it is true?—and you knew it, Horace?

"Ever since I knew you, my dear. If you had been Whiterduce's son I shouldn't have wanted your acquaintance, Murgy. It was your not being that that made me begin caring for you. I don't take any stock in damned aristocrats."

"Oh, why didn't you tell me?"

"Do you think you'd have been happier to know it?"

"And my mother deceived me, too? She wasn't my mother?"

"Listen, my dear," said Horace, with a peculiar tenderness. "You've lost nothing

real. If the woman you took to be your mother loved you, you had her love, and this story makes no difference in it. If you like money and the world you live in you've got them still; what you are isn't changed by anything Hemynge told you; nothing can change your flesh and blood and soul—if you think you have a soul. Stick to what's real, and you'll lose nothing that a fellow of some sense would care to keep. If you're not a Whiterduce, what's the odds? — no more were you yesterday or any time. All the odds is that now you know it, and then you didn't. Up to now your friends have been keeping a secret for you; now you've got to keep it, too. The worst that could happen would be having to pay those blackguards hush-money, but maybe we can stop 'em from that before we've done with 'em. There's a good deal more to the yarn than Hemynge thought it healthy to tell. Our side hasn't had an innings yet!"

"What you say about mother's true. I didn't think of that," said Murgatroyd, who had listened to this with great intentness. "When she said she loved me she must have meant it. There couldn't have been any humbug in that. It's no matter if I call her

'mother' before you fellows; and she said, 'I'll be a true loving mother to you.' She said that the last time she spoke to me. She kissed me without my ever expecting such a thing. She must have meant it, and if I wasn't really her own son she must have meant it all the more, for, of course, if I had been her own son she would have cared for me as a matter of course, without thinking anything particular about it. Isn't that so? Tell me if it isn't, you fellows, because . . . Her loving me was the only thing I care about!" he cried passionately, tears breaking through his voice. "She did love me! She did! It was what made a man of me! That's why I've been working and studying, so as to deserve it. If that was a lie, everything's a lie! You're liars! And I won't live! Tell me! Tell me! Tell me the truth!" His voice, with its savage eagerness, rang in the room, where the others sat so silent. His face looked dark and red, and his head was thrust forward. His fists were doubled and his half-bent arms vibrated spasmodically as the words went from him.

But it was not for nothing that he had governed and disciplined himself these latter months. Even at this headlong moment he

made an effort over himself like that of an athlete struggling to be free from the constriction of a serpent. With a downward drive of the arms he seemed to thrust the savage to his feet.

He stood panting for a moment, then turned, walked to his chair, and sat down in it.

"I beg your pardon, fellows," said he. "I'm not her son. Remember! I'm a beast, trying to make myself a man. If you only knew how hard it was. . . . But I mean to be a man for her sake, though I'm not her son."

"By God, old fellow, you are a man! You've got the stuff!" said Polydore, with emphasis. "Why, I'd no notion of this!"

"Horace is the only one that knows the story," said Gabriel. "We came over here to hear it. Tell us how we can beat 'em on the hush-money business, Horace."

"That won't be any trouble," Murgatroyd observed. "I'm not going to pay any hush-money. Now that I know the thing's true I don't care who else knows it. Why, I used to be ashamed because I wasn't fit to be a Whiterduce, and now that I know I'm not I'll take care everybody knows it. I

won't wait for Hemynge to tell. People must have been wondering all this time how such a woman as my mother came to have such a son. I always wondered myself. I'm glad I can show 'em now that it isn't so! God bless her! I can do that for her, anyhow!"

"There's nothing in you she need be ashamed of, dear," said Horace, gently. "But no matter about that. Be sure you're making no mistake about wanting this known. Most people would give all they have to stand where you are. The reputation of good birth will do what money can't. You can lose money, and make it again, but you can't get back a birthright."

"Murgy, you'd best take time to think it over," said Gabriel. "There ain't any hurry. Just have a good sleep over it, and see how you feel in the morning. Don't worry about Hemynge. He'll wait! I guess there ain't anybody more anxious to keep it dark than he is, seeing it's his income! The day it comes out he'll have to begin earning an honest living or starve. So do you take a good look over it and make up your mind sure and easy!"

"That's so, Murgy," added Polydore,

earnestly. "Don't you do any darned foolishness. It's none of other folks' business that you ain't a Whiterduce. Horace and Gabe and I like you all the better for it, but others ain't like us. It's all right for you to get around and have larks with us once in a while, but if you found the fellows up at the club were making mouths at you behind your back you mightn't like it so well. You've got both sides of the game now, and you'd better keep on that way."

After a moment's pause, Murgatroyd said, "I guess you don't know the way I feel. I like to be whatever I am. It was all right before I knew I was counterfeit; but I can't go on with it now that I do know. Hush-money to keep it dark! I'd pay all I've got—if I could manage it no other way—to make it known! Not that I wish I'd been brought up a street beggar or thief; and I might better have been dead than never have heard her—my mother—say she loved me; and I hope to keep whatever good I've got from studying, and all that. But, you see, fellows, there's nothing for me to think over, and only one possible thing to do, and the sooner I do it the happier I'll be."

"Then I'll say I think you're just right!"

said Horace, sitting even more erect than usual; "and now we can go ahead and make a clean sweep of all this deviltry. I've been aching to get at the job these four years! Flowers come out of rottenness, Murgy, and so have you. No matter about the woman that gave birth to you—she's dead long since; but the creature that begot you is fit for nothing but the gallows, and that's what he'll get. It was he killed Whiterduce, after blackmailing him for twenty years. I've had it on my mind ever since, and neither he nor Risdon nor anybody else suspected it; because I made up my mind, if I could never tell you, to tell nobody. But the decision you've made to-night will hang that man; and I hope you won't regret it!"

"He the murderer!" muttered Murgatroyd. He sat silent for a while, staring into the gloom beyond the gaslight. It was a grim thought—that by his agency the man through whom he had received life was to suffer death!

But there was a terrible realism, or naturalism, about this young man. He did not take the conventional or sentimental view. As his true mother was not the woman who had given him birth, so he attached nothing

of sanctity to the thought of the man whose selfish and vagrant impulse had called him into existence and given him no further care. Murgatroyd had cast off the tyranny of names and formulas.

"It's right," he said at last. "If murderers must hang, I ought to hang him. He ruined a woman to beget me; then he made me the pretext for robbery and murder. It's right that I should bring about his punishment, too!"

None of the three listeners ever forgot the tone and look with which Murgatroyd pronounced these words. They were the sentence of death not upon the murderer only, but upon his own youth as well. They marked the stern, inevitable recognition of spiritual realities which the evil of the world imposes on all who advance beyond the merely instinctive and animal stage of being.

"He's right!" said Gabriel, nodding his head slowly.

"There's no getting round it!" assented Polydore, with a sigh.

"I wish I'd killed the scoundrel myself first and told Murgy about it afterward!" said Horace, between his teeth. "But he's right, all the same. And now, fellows, be-

fore I open up the inside of this thing I propose we have in Blackmer Risdon. I came to know Risdon pretty well a year ago, and he's an honest chap, as men go. He has an eye to business, but he wants to do the square thing, too. He'd have got to the bottom of this puzzle long ago if he could have got me to give him a hint; and it's to his credit that he didn't force my hand—some men would have tried it. He knew I knew the secret, and to know such secrets doesn't improve one's own reputation; but Risdon never took advantage of that. The best way to bring out the yarn is through his paper; and he deserves whatever good it'll do him. So, if you're agreeable, I'll send a messenger-boy to the *Constitution* office—it's close by—and Risdon will be here in ten minutes."

CHAPTER XII

SOCIETY ETHICS

"Where are you going, my dear?" asked Mrs. Sharingbourne, at nine o'clock in the morning, meeting her daughter coming down stairs with her bonnet on.

"To take a walk around the Park with Sabina Estengrewe."

"A walk so soon after breakfast? That hasn't been your habit, Isabella. And I don't see how this intimacy with Sabina can be of any use or benefit to you. A girl whose elder sister would commit such a disgraceful folly as Aurelia did—and who lectures over the country herself—I don't approve of it!"

"Remember, mamma, that the Church has washed away the sins of the family and made them white as snow. No girls can be unrespectable, no matter what they do, whose aunt has been wedded to Mr. Agabag."

"You know, Isabella, that I have always considered Mr. Agabag to be a fool."

"But not for marrying a person who had money, mamma!"

"It is unpardonable for a man to make himself ridiculous, as Agabag did by marrying a woman old enough to be his mother. Her money is not an argument, for there are plenty of rich girls whom he might have had. No doubt he counted on soon being a widower; but that is far from certain. Semi-imbeciles like Mrs. Jellicoe often live to a great age. And she will always be round his neck wherever he goes, and he can have no more interviews in his private study with pretty young penitents. He made the mistake of his life, and her money will never compensate him for it. Had the sexes been reversed, it would have been another thing. No girl becomes ridiculous by marrying a rich man of any age. Girls cannot support themselves——"

"Isn't that an exaggeration, mamma? Sabina gets twenty-five dollars a night in the season, and the young lady who is singing in Mr. Scaramanga's opera——"

"I am not speaking of girls who compromise their social position, or who never had any. My dear, you have theories, but I have experience. In my own case, I suffered

by a misfortune, not a fault. Mr. Sharingbourne was wealthy when he married me, but he lost his fortune, and then died. But you know how hard it has been for us to make ends meet. Had it not been for the kindness of friends you could not have gone to college, or, for that matter, be about to marry the richest young man in town. Why does not he accompany you in your walks?"

"Probably he detests me as much as I do him——"

"Why should you detest a man who has no bad qualities and whom you can turn round your finger? For Heaven's sake, Isabella, do nothing indiscreet in relation to Murgatroyd. Indiscretions of any sort, either before or after marriage, are unpardonable and useless. You gain nothing and you risk everything."

"Do I understand that you object to intrigues after marriage, mamma? Surely if I can twist my husband round my finger it would be foolish of me not to turn my power to my advantage! A woman with a nincompoop husband needs variety, and need run no risk in having it. Besides, society helps her, because they all do it."

"My dear, I think it vulgar to say such

things. I don't, of course, imagine that you think them. No woman of good society admits serious attentions from a man not her husband, not only because of the danger of discovery, but for the sake of her own self-respect and her regard for her children."

"Out of regard to her children? But can't you imagine a case, mamma, where a woman might encourage an intrigue with an eye to her children's benefit—their pecuniary benefit, of course? Suppose a handsome widow with a daughter, for example, and not enough money properly to educate her. Some rich man—an ex-army officer perhaps—pays this handsome widow what you call 'attentions,' and she allows him to—what is the matter, mamma?—allows him to settle her daughter's school and college bills. Could not that be managed, with proper precautions, and yet the lady retain her social position—and an easy conscience?"

The stately matron put out a hand and caught the banister; she threw a quick glance over her shoulder. Isabella had spoken in her usual clear, bell-like tones.

"Isabella!—can I credit my ears—that you dare—your own mother—to insinuate——"

The girl gave a cold smile.

"What agitates you, mamma? Of course I quite comprehend that we are not human beings; but it's amusing, sometimes, to imagine what might happen if we were!"

"Is nothing sacred to you — no virtue——"

"Virtue! Do you mean hypocrisy and lying? Oh, how I should thank God—if there is such a Being—if some person of our own immediate, impeccable social circle would come out frankly and unreservedly and confess that he or she had been guilty of some genuine, living, natural, human wickedness! Sometimes it seems to me as if this smooth, tinkling, smirking, rotten-hearted respectability would drive me mad. It has driven me to what is perhaps something worse! You have cultivated my mind —was it so as to kill my heart more easily? Tell me the truth, for once, mamma; have you ever been wicked?"

"Isabella!—can it be you who——"

"Ah! that is like the mammas on the stage. Is that all?"

"How can you not go down on your knees——"

"I can't act up to you, I'm afraid. I

haven't your dramatic talent. So that is all? Well, then, here!"

With trembling fingers and a face quivering with shame, misery, and contempt, she opened the little morocco bag at her girdle. She took from it a piece of paper folded small.

"I have carried this with me, night and day, ever since I found it," she said. "You thought you had destroyed them all, I suppose, or put them somewhere else; but this had got in behind the little drawers in the old desk you gave me, and I found it there, and read it. Here is the date, you see—ten years ago; and the handwriting—almost the same then as now; and here are his initials—'A. D. S.' Are all love-letters like this, mamma? Are those you got from papa like it? It is a pleasant thing for a daughter to find, isn't it? It is not at all the way I ever heard General Stepyngstone talk to you; he has always spoken very politely and ceremoniously. He is a soldier, a brave, true, gallant gentleman, of course. Why does he write so differently from the way he talks? Take it; I had never meant to show it to you, but one is sometimes surprised out of the strict proprieties. Oh, mamma! I

could have forgiven you the wickedness, and loved you more than ever; but the lies and the hypocrisy. . . . I told you I was going to walk with Sabina Estengrewe; it was a lie. I am going to meet my lover—not Mr. Whiterduce—my lover! Why should not I have an intrigue as well as you? —but I will not lie about it! Good-by, mamma."

She opened the door, paused on the threshold a moment, then shut the door behind her and was gone. Mrs. Sharingbourne remained supporting herself against the newel-post, the letter in her hand. She had not at all the aspect of a woman such as a gallant soldier would lose his heart to. After a while she heard the sound of a servant coming up from below. She forced her shaking, enfeebled limbs to bear her to her room, entered, and locked the door.

Meanwhile Isabella crossed the Park, delaying on the way, as if trying to make the fresh greenness of the grass and trees enter into her parched soul. But Nature seldom helps us at need. Isabella finally reached the other side, traversed the boulevard, and made several turnings, which brought her to the theatre. She passed along a side alley,

and was joined at small side door by Scaramanga. He took her right hand in his left, smiling but saying nothing, and led her within.

It was dark; here and there a gas-jet, partly turned on, lit the narrow passages and the steep stairs. Presently he opened a door and ushered her into a small room profusely but untidily furnished. It was a mixture of parlor and office, with suggestions of the property-room. Three or four huge photographs of handsome actresses stood on tables or were tacked on the walls—that of Mlle. Letitia in the most conspicuous place. A small door, standing ajar, opened into a dressing-room. The apartment was the business abode of the manager of the theatre.

"He never gets here before eleven, so we've a good hour and a half to talk it over in," remarked Scaramanga, throwing back his hair and catching a glance at himself in the looking-glass. "How is the Princess this morning? Sad? or nervous? Let it be anything but irresolute!"

"This air is horrible—it smells of stale liquor and cigars," said Isabella. "Can't you open that window?"

"I fear not—the brute has driven a nail

in the sash; you won't notice it so much after a minute." He seated himself on the belittered sofa and drew her down beside him, kissing her hand. She looked at him intently.

"Ah, those eyes! they see into my soul," said he.

"There is nothing I so much desire as to believe in you, Dev," said Isabella. "But I know that my future will depend on myself, and not on you. If I have not the talent to make my own way, independent of you, we may grow to be . . . anything but lovers! You are not strong enough to master me, Dev."

"I want no mastery but what your love gives me."

"Don't say pretty things to me. I'm not in that mood. A woman fighting for her life is not in tune for compliments."

"That is a strange way to—to describe it!" said he, raising his head.

"It is the right way. When you meet a girl in society she is soft and pliable, because she has the world on her side and is secure. But when she cuts loose from society she must fight for her life. If she depends on her lover she will lose him."

"Ah, that is not generous!"

"It is true, Dev. As soon as you felt that I was helpless and couldn't do without you, you would begin to be indifferent. I shouldn't blame you, for it would be my fault, not yours. Why should I expect you to devote your life to a woman whom women would despise and men insult? A husband may neglect his wife, because marriage itself still protects her; but a mistress neglected by her lover—what protection has she? She needs ten times as much devotion as the wife, and for that very reason gets not a tenth as much. Yes, Dev; and all experience confirms it."

"In the first place, I deny it. We hear only of those who fail; the others are silent. But, Belle, let us drop all that and marry! What end have I but your happiness? for mine can come only through yours!"

She put her hand in his and her eyes softened.

"Why, that solves it all, then!" cried he, springing up. "I'll get a license at once! We've wasted too much time already. Where shall I take you in the meantime?"

"I will stay here—and you with me,"

replied she, drawing him down beside her in her turn.

He put on an air of perplexity.

She was plainly moved now, and struggled hard to get back her former self-possession. Her bosom went up and down beneath her thin summer dress. She held her face averted, but he kept saying, "Look at me, darling; look at me!" till at last she turned, and let her eyes meet his. They leaned slowly toward each other and their lips met.

"It shall not be that, dear; it shall not!" murmured she, letting his mouth feel the movement of hers as she spoke. "Until I am as free as you I will not be your wife!"

He laid his hands on her shoulders and looked at her. "Why do you bewilder me so, darling? It shall be anything—anything you wish! Don't you feel how utterly I am yours, body and soul, always? I care nothing for what name you come to me by, only come—come!"

"If passion were only immortal," she whispered, with a tremble, "or if its moment were only eternity!"

"Love like ours——"

"No, no! hush, hush! Ah, me, how easily a woman is a fool. They laugh at

our new education, but we may thank Heaven for anything that helps us part our heads from our hearts, if only for a few minutes at a time. It is what we think in cold blood that stays true; what we feel—well, if that were true, earth would be heaven! I bewilder you? I bewilder myself—on purpose, almost, I think. But there are some things I am sure of—one is that I cannot live any longer at home. I have said things—but no matter about that. And I cannot be the wife of that—of Mr. Whiterduce. Those are two certainties. But the wedding is fixed for Midsummer Day, so I have no time to lose. I must go. I have a little money of my own—about seven hundred dollars—I can live a year on it. I shall go to one of the great cities and try to get on the stage—not as a star; as a chorus girl, if I can do no better at first. I thought of taking a teacher for my voice here, but there's no time. I must go as I am. Well, that is all. Of course, I shall take another name. I will pay so much homage to society. It's the only way I can return my many obligations—by self-annihilation."

This speech startled Scaramanga in earnest. He missed from it a feature of leading

importance—namely, himself. His relations with Isabella had always interested him, and since they had seemed to be approaching a crisis, had excited him. Above all, it had awakened the sensuality and the vanity which are at the basis of the true musical temperament. He possessed intellect and prudence, but these could be temporarily overborne by the flattering tide of propensities which, though essentially base, wore for the moment lovely hues of beauty and delight. Thus he was capable, under due stimulus, of real recklessness; but the stimulus must be largely made up of appeals to egotism. Not that he wished to be coarsely and obviously exalted, for he was a man of refined culture; but exalted—deified—he must feel himself to be, implicitly if not explicitly, else his reaction would be incomplete and stiff.

He expressed his feeling naively, though gracefully enough. "Don't you see how this humiliates me?" he said, gloomily, resting his cheek upon his hand. "What part do you give me in your plans? I offer you my life, and you leave me standing without a word!"

Isabella could doubtless read him aright;

but a woman does not always wish to see as far as she can.

"I said we must both be free," was her reply. "I do not ask you to take part with me; but I do not forbid you, Dev!"

These words, and still more her manner, rekindled him.

"Oh, let us have no more reserves and ambiguities!" he exclaimed. "Open your soul to me! Tell me what I want to hear! Freedom? I can feel no freedom but in your arms!"

To a woman thoroughly and fanatically in love with him, her lover may utter any extravagancies, poetic, histrionic, or idiotic, and she will gather them to her heart for pure gold. But so long as she still retains an atom of the critical leaven, or if she has not yet accomplished the assimilation of the man with her ideal of him, he were best be wary not to force the note.

That poetic paradox of Scaramanga's struck a tiny chill through Isabella. In her present abnormally sensitive state she was morbidly alive to the faintest intonations of insincerity. She had believed herself to love this man with all her heart; that was her great exculpation in her own eyes; but at

this juncture a most inopportune misgiving stirred in the bottom of her mind. "What if I were mistaken in him after all?"

She promptly suppressed it; to extirpate it was beyond her power. But to confess error at this stage was too much for her courage. She had burned her ships; she was destitute of alternatives. She must temporize, if nothing more, and doubtless this might prove in the end a false alarm.

"Can you trust no sense but your ears, Dev?" she said, letting her eyelids fall. "I am leaving all I have known and going into the unknown. What can I tell you or foretell? You are free, and no one but you will know where I am gone. I cannot say more, and I can promise nothing. Only—if you have the will—and the power—it should be enough."

"I trust you, and you shall trust me," he said, with a noble accent that relieved her greatly. "You know how I worship you, but I will show you that I understand you and respect you. You won't forbid me to go with you? I couldn't endure not to have personally cared for your safety and comfort; but beyond that all shall be in your own time and way. I shall need no

words—I shall know when my probation is at an end—only let me hope that it will end at last, or how can I live?"

This was much more nearly the right tone, and he found his reward in her eyes and on her lips. What else passed between them had reference chiefly to the arrangements for departure.

Scaramanga was a good and earnest actor, and no member of his audience followed his performances with more sympathy and conviction than did he himself.

After he and Isabella had gone there was an afterpiece which would have interested them had they known of it. Letitia Valentine emerged from the little dressing-room, fanning herself with a palm-leaf fan, for it was warm in there. She flung herself down on the sofa, laughed a little, and finally dropped into a revery which lasted till the manager came in.

CHAPTER XIII

RISDON HAS HIS REWARD

The following day was a memorable one in the annals of the *Constitution.* At two o'clock in the morning Blackmer Risdon had gone to bed, or, more accurately, had fallen on his bed, in his shirt and trousers, and instantly fallen asleep. He had been up and hard at work for two days and two nights, he was thoroughly happy and he was exhausted. Such conditions are favorable to sound sleep, and he had one. Let the rest of the world wake and be excited now; he had made his "scoop" and beaten his record, and had earned the right to repose.

Many hundred thousand cups of coffee got cold that morning, while those who should have drunk them absorbed instead the extraordinary story which the *Constitution* served up to them, covering two pages of the paper. Many a business man, hastening betimes to his office and buying his paper

from a stand, allowed himself to become entangled in the opening paragraphs of the yarn, and thereafter overrode his station, if he were in a car, or collided on the pavement with other pedestrians, loitering like himself with their heads between the pages. Many a wife and daughter of society, too, kept the housekeeper waiting for directions, or delayed their shopping or their morning walk, powerless to tear themselves from the thrilling narrative. Nay, surprising numbers of the proletariat, whose newspaper reading is uniformly confined to a column or two of the latter pages, found a wealth of unwonted interest in that morning's issue, and spelled it all out sitting on park benches, or leaning against area railings, or declaiming the more sensational passages aloud to listening groups in the liquor saloons. As for the clubs, small and great, they reechoed all day long, and far into the next night, with voices of opinion, criticism, and comment, accompanied and reinforced with much champagne and countless cocktails. And the electric wire brought the startling news to the President of the United States, in the White House, who perused it with lifted eyebrows; and to the Senators

and Congressmen in the Capitol, some of whom devoured it with marked uneasiness; and abstracts of it were read in evening journals of London, Paris, Berlin, and other European capitals. It was a mighty triumph for the *Constitution*. And Stukely Poyntell, to whose supervision the literary excellence of the production was due, was afterward accustomed to remark that no tales that his friend Verinder Vyse had written, or could ever hope to write, would equal, in their entire aggregate of readers, a tithe of the multitude who followed with bated breath the columns of this solitary effort of his own. "I don't blow about my abilities, and I don't rely upon romance for a livelihood," quoth he, "but when I do happen to jot down a trifle in that line—well, you can see the result for yourself!"

Neither indeed would it become the present writer to enter the lists against a success so conspicuous; and, therefore, instead of attempting a paraphrase, a few extracts from the *Constitution*, having particular reference to the events treated in this volume, will here be thrown together. It is needless to transcribe the whole article, inasmuch as some of its passages have been anticipated in

the foregoing pages, and others would introduce matters foreign to our proper theme :

" As the innumerable readers of the *Constitution* are aware," began the article, " the grandeur and immortality of the republic, both in theory and in the concrete, have ever been cardinal points in our preaching and in our practice. Yet are we far from ignoring the wisdom of the old proverb, ' Safe bind, safe find ; ' or, in phrase more familiar to patriotic American ears, ' Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty ! '

" For be it confessed that certain features of our system of government render it peculiarly open to the insidious and treasonable attacks of ambitious and unscrupulous men. Our very strength and prosperity as a nation have begot an indifference and an easy-going tolerance in respect of hostile and disloyal speech and even action, of which more than one calamity in our recent history, whether political, industrial, or financial, should have taught us the unwisdom. But it may safely be affirmed that never, since the outbreak of the great Rebellion itself, has the integrity and very life of the institutions which we have so well loved and so gallantly defended been so dangerously

threatened as by the widespread and amazing conspiracy which it is to-day our fortunate office (alone among the journals of America) to reveal and describe. For many a month past, indeed, has the *Constitution* camped upon the trail of this stupendous iniquity; but we were determined to give no hint of our discoveries or our purpose until the moment came to strike, and to strike home! Weary has been the delay and long the waiting; but at last the hour has come! The labor, the anxiety, the detective sagacity which has been put forth without intermission, and the money which has been lavished without stint, have to-day their reward. We have successfully and triumphantly performed what the most reluctant must admit to be a great public service; and it is with a proud humility that we this morning lay before an audience, which can be only estimated by millions, the final journalistic result. . . .

"It is not amidst the so-called criminal classes, then, that the most dangerous elements in the community are to be sought. Now and here, as in all times and places, intellect and education, culture and refinement, birth and breeding, have furnished

forth those individuals who have most seriously menaced human progress and welfare. Alexander, Attila, Napoleon—to mention no others—were men of giant brain and genius, far-seeing and of transcendent ambition, broad and inscrutable in conception, relentless and daring in execution. And the personage whom we are about to name was, in gifts and accomplishments, not unworthy to be placed side by side with these renowned figures of history. In some respects, his character was unique. He had no craving for the external rewards of eminent achievement, for the applausive shouts of the vulgar, for the devoted enthusiasm of disciples, even for the reluctant admiration of the few competent to appreciate his stupendous talents. Power was his single aim; power absolute and practical, yet abstracted to the verge of spirituality. This man contemplated no less a feat than to gather in his single hand the reins by which the complete internal and foreign policy of this republic are swayed; he meant to rule with the autocracy of a Cyrus or a Cæsar over the public and private life of every American citizen; nay, he had already advanced beyond the stage of mere intention, and had actually begun to carry

his despotic schemes into act! It is the simple truth that at the period of his sudden and tragic decease, this astonishing personage—who, to all outward appearance, was one of the most retiring, the least active, the least publicly familiar participants of our civic existence—this man, we repeat, was, in fact, an American czar, passing decrees as absolute as those of the Russian autocrat, and which, with each passing day, were becoming more sweeping in their scope and more certain and punctual in their effect. Nor can the possibility fairly be denied, that, had not his secret and mysterious career been cut short when it was by the hand of violence, we might ere this have awakened (too late!) to find ourselves hopelessly entangled in toils, ability to escape from which had been cunningly removed from us, while the tyranny itself had been so subtly adapted to the selfishness and cupidity of human nature that too few might have been found patriotic and self-abnegating enough to undertake the perilous crusade which should restore our purloined birthright. Lulled to slumber, like Samson, with the soothing caresses of ingenious flattery, the hair of our strength was being shorn and the limbs of our vigor bound

with cords fine as silk, but stronger than steel.

"Unlike Samson, however, we might have awakened only to turn once more to sleep, murmuring that since, after all, our internal resources were never more promising, our arrangements for private comfort and public order never more effective, and our national defensive and offensive abilities never more highly organized and formidable than now, it were mere sentimental folly to find fault with the political manœuvres to which so materially beneficial a result was due. 'Have we not heard and experienced enough of the robbery, rottenness, and impositions of all departments of municipal and national administration?' we might exclaim. 'Are we not, under a single strong and wise ruler, a thousandfold freer and more comfortable (save only in theory) than ever heretofore? If he has been clever enough to fool us so well to our own well-being, let him enjoy the personal fruits of his enterprise and welcome! The Declaration of Independence was an excellent thing in its time and place; it filled a felt want. The Constitution of the United States is a very creditable product of statesmanship, whose

chief defect is only that it is not adapted to our present needs, and the principle of universal suffrage is, as an abstract conception, entirely admirable, and we sincerely regret that it has proved to be so utter a failure in practice. This is a country of industrious men and women, whose controlling desire is to mind their own business and support themselves and their families. The political racket has been decidedly overdone; its issue has been to develop a worthless and idle class of rascals, who think of nothing but how to pick the pockets of honest and hard-working citizens. The latter, moreover, are forced to waste hours of valuable time every day in reading and discussing political schemes and doings, the sole end of which is to determine which of two or more gangs of thieves shall ply their calling at our expense, or whether there shall be a coalition between them to divide the spoils. This preposterous state of things has, in our opinion, lasted quite long enough, and not only do we refuse to be indignant with the able gentleman who has quietly and unobtrusively put an end to it, but we are strongly tempted to vote him the thanks of the community and to wish more power to his elbow!'

"In some such terms, we fear, cynically humorous and marked by that characteristic American tone which might be defined as pessimistic optimism, would the mass of our fellow-countrymen have met the discovery of this comprehensive *coup d'état*, had it been allowed fully to mature itself. To some extent the public mind had been made familiar with minor but analogous enterprises. We had witnessed the scandals of the great 'rings' in New York, San Francisco, and elsewhere, the tyranny of trusts, and the lawlessness of organized mobs. It had become our habit rather to applaud the cleverness and success of rascality than to encounter it with grave moral rebuke. Spasms of 'reform' were, indeed, still witnessed; but these had been so artfully availed of by the rascals themselves (conscious that in the long run the work of politics must be resigned to professional politicians), that honest men had grown sceptical and 'The Star-eyed Goddess' had begun to take her place as part and parcel of the great American joke.

"Be that as it may, the present plot differed importantly from all previous ones, not in comprehensiveness only, but in the man-

ner of its organization and development, and in the impressive secrecy which veiled the centre of its activity. For, improbable though it might at first sight appear, there is serious ground for believing that the identity of the ruling personage in this great organization—as well as his ultimate designs—was hidden from the knowledge not merely of the rank and file, but of the inner circle of captains and councillors. Each one of the numberless agents was initiated according to his capacity for usefulness; his knowledge of the impulse which directed him extended so far and no further; each found his own greed ministered to, his own faculties exploited, his own ambition flattered; in his own sphere he was permitted verge and room enough; but the moment he should attempt to pry into the mysteries above him, he was given to understand that the ground was hollow beneath his feet, and that any further betrayal of idle curiosity would involve him in destruction. Though every detail of the mighty web was woven with spider-like accuracy and could be reached in an instant by the intelligence which operated at the centre, yet for all outside of that centre it possessed no coherent or fathomable plan,

and was grasped but in fragments or sections. And when obedience and discretion are prompted by the strongest motives of self-interest, they are apt to be accorded. It is quite possible, moreover, that numerous persons of the highest honor and integrity, who would have died sooner than knowingly co-operate with such an organization, may nevertheless have ignorantly served some of its most pressing needs. Nothing is easier than to govern a man, provided you know his circumstances and characteristics, and that he is kept from any suspicion that he is being manipulated.

"In spite of the sinister genius which marks the formulating of this plot, yet, once formed, it was not so difficult to carry out as might be imagined. It was only necessary to begin at the right end, in the right way, and it almost seemed to work itself. The division of parties in this country renders the majorities either way comparatively moderate, and therefore easily controlled; or, should there be an exceptionally strong opposition on one or the other part, that will not embarrass a manager whose tools are indifferently democratic or republican. Having filled the minor offices of trust and pow-

er with henchmen of his own, he will then proceed to lay his snares for bigger game. By slow and patient degrees the State Legislatures and Governors, the Electoral Colleges, finally the President and the Cabinet themselves, fall under his sway. Petty judges are easily bought or influenced; and when he has secured a majority in the Supreme Court his triumph may be deemed secure. He may now make illegality itself legal, and while maintaining the hollow semblance of the republic unimpaired, may fill it with the most uncompromising realities of despotism.

"When we say that the prime mover in this affair was probably unknown even to his nearest lieutenants, we refer to him, of course, only in his official capacity. As a private citizen he was well and favorably known; and there seems to be little doubt that several men, who were in reality his closest coadjutors, imagined him to be not their master, but their innocent and unsuspecting tool! They imagined that he knew not even of the existence of the vast engine whose every movement his single hand in fact controlled. He was, they fancied, an easy-going personage, whose paramount re-

spectability and enormous fortune rendered him peculiarly useful as a cover and aid to their operations. They came to him to cajole him out of the financial means and the ægis of his good name, to enable them to execute designs of which, in truth, he was himself the originator and instigator. We can picture the saturnine humor with which he must often have listened to their arguments and subterfuges, and marked the solicitude with which they hid from the arch conspirator this or that external feature of his own conspiracy!

"It has been said that a man who lays aside definitely all moral scruples becomes possessed of enormous power. Still more is he powerful when he also sacrifices the material rewards of ambition for the sake of more firmly fastening his hold upon its esoteric reality. In him 'the last infirmity of noble minds' has freed itself from the main obstacle to its success. He is unknown; none will ever celebrate his genius or acclaim his victories; but, in his lonely pride, he has his own esteem, more worth to him than any other, and he is secure from the base envy and revenge of underlings and the jealousy and hostile combinations of his

peers. Moreover—'Omne ignotum pro magnifico!'—his decrees have tenfold authority, falling from unknown lips. His attitude, in short, as nearly approaches that of an intangible and invisible divinity as mortal man can attain; and though we must turn with a shudder of reprobation from the spectacle of a great mind devoting itself to the destruction of the freedom of his own native land, we cannot withhold from him our intellectual homage, and we may perhaps believe that his purposes were not wholly evil, but that he sincerely thought that America would derive more benefit than injury from his audacious embezzlement of her liberties.

"Mortal, nevertheless, he was; and in this unavoidable fact lay the cause of his weakness and his fall. He must live in society, in personal relations with his fellows; he was subject to disease and accident, and he could not avoid those personal and private relations and entanglements which, though having no bearing on his grander interests, might yet inadvertently become an obstacle in their path. So, indeed, it turned out; and we are now to show how an incident quite foreign to the conspiracy accomplished its overthrow

by the death of him in the hollow of whose hand it lay, and apart from whose leadership it must collapse. The murder of Pynchepole Whiterduce—for the moment has come to withdraw the veil from this hitherto admired and respected name—by the blackmailer, Patrick Barrable, might, with little exaggeration, be said to have modified the course of human history. For America is the hope and the arbiter of the world, and he who controls her destinies stands within measurable distance of the dictatorship of modern civilization.

"Having, then, fortified himself at every point with proofs that the pretended heir of the Whiterduces was in fact his own son, and secured himself against personal danger by arrangements to have the truth published in the event of his death or sequestration, Patrick Barrable was ready to spring his mine upon his unsuspecting antagonist. He seems not to have been at this time aware that he was about to grapple with the man with whose organization he had recently become distantly affiliated; nor is it likely that Whiterduce himself recognized him as a member. There are indications that, later on, they became mutually aware of the truth; but the

business which now brought them together was a purely personal one, and was conducted without reference to anything else. Barrable's position was impregnable, and Whiterduce recognized it as such. His chagrin must have been unspeakable; but he seems to have disguised it under a somewhat indifferent demeanor, agreeing to purchase silence on not too extravagant terms, but intimating that the secret of the child's birth, while he would prefer to have it maintained, was not, however, of any vital moment to him. A contract was made by which Barrable was to receive a sum of money at regular intervals, which any indiscretion on his part would forfeit; and upon this understanding they parted. Barrable, on various occasions afterward, seems to have made efforts to have the sum increased; but, upon the whole, matters went on smoothly for many years.

"Conditions leading to a change were nevertheless approaching. When Whiterduce adopted the boy he had looked forward to so educating him as to render him a competent inheritor of the great schemes to which his own life was devoted. But there are idiosyncrasies and limitations of temperament and capacity with which the most

thorough educational methods contend in vain, and as the boy grew toward manhood it gradually became obvious that he would never manifest those exceptional traits and faculties which were essential to his proposed destiny. He had neither the type of intellect nor the personal disposition to regulate and control such vast and complicated affairs. He was, in truth, a young fellow whose instincts and sympathies tended to draw him toward the rank in life from which he sprang; frank, simple, and affectionate, and inspiring good-will and kindness in all whom he approached, he was yet in no respect adapted to the stern and lonely *rôle* to which his adoptive father had hoped to introduce him.

"Bitter, no doubt, must have been Pynchepole Whiterduce's disappointment. Even the most reserved of men is human, and craves some fellow mortal in whom to confide. Whiterduce's suspicions of his wife (the utter baselessness of which we have indicated above) had cut him off from companionship in that direction, and it was now evident that the youth with whom he had hoped to share his awful responsibilities would fail him also. A certain largeness

and sense of justice in the man's nature is illustrated by the fact that he never treated the innocent boy otherwise than with consideration and even kindness. . . . Having, then, made up his mind that he must go on to the end of his career in the same solitude in which he had commenced it, he cast about to provide the boy with some interest or occupation suited to his predilections and capacity. What is to our present purpose, he appears to have determined to reveal to him the facts of his birth, in order that he might freely choose his own course in relation thereto. More than this, he must have resolved no longer to keep from the outside world the true statement of this matter, having reached the conclusion that the change in their common prospects made the continuance of the filial fiction no longer indispensable, and that it was desirable to put an end to the prolonged annoyance to which the blackmailer Barrable had subjected him. . . .

"Meantime he had discovered Barrable's connection with the Order, and Barrable himself, his senses sharpened by the private transactions which had brought him in contact with the other, had attained something

more than a suspicion that Whiterduce was far more deeply involved in these great underground schemes than most of the members had any idea of. . . .

"Such being the situation, the fatal interview took place. Its details will perhaps be brought out at the trial of the murderer; it is enough for us at present to know that Barrable, driven to desperation by this cutting off of his supplies, and realizing that his own very existence might now be imperilled, resolved to secure revenge and safety at a single blow. Disguising his purpose, he made an occasion to pass behind Whiterduce's chair, and in another minute the foremost political genius and most profound schemer in statecraft of our era had ceased to breathe! It was a dastardly, an outrageous crime; yet in the inscrutable dispensations of Providence it befell at a fortunate moment for the safety of the commonweal. For there is good reason to believe that had Pynchepole Whiterduce survived another three months, this republic of ours, to create which our forefathers fought to the death, and for whose preservation we recently poured forth oceans of blood and treasure, would have been past praying for! . . .

"It has always been a mystery why, in view of the large rewards offered for the apprehension of the criminal, and the well-known sagacity of our detective service (not to mention unprofessional investigations upon which it is needless to enlarge to our readers), no elucidation of the deed had up to this moment been obtained. The fact is, a curious deadlock was reached in the matter, almost approaching the confines of comedy. There is no doubt that Barrable's act was known to other members of the organization. It could not have heen the wish of these men to protect the murderer; for it soon transpired that Pynchepole Whiterduce was, in truth, what few had till then suspected him of being—the real head and mainstay of the conspiracy. The cause of this revelation is plain—it was due to the sudden cessation not only of pecuniary supplies, which Whiterduce had been accustomed to disburse with a lavish hand, but to the absence of any further orders or directions for the guidance and information of the various chapters of the organization. This abrupt stoppage, occurring simultaneously with Whiterduce's death, placed him for the first time in his true light; his loss identified him!

Inasmuch as his murder was perpetrated, not in fulfilment of any decree of the order, but was the crime of private hatred and fatal to the most vital interests of the order itself, it seems strange at the first blush that Barrable was not either delivered up to justice or executed by sentence of his fellow-members. So, no doubt, he would have been had not they been actually afraid to denounce or lay hands upon him. The man knew too much. His arrest would have been followed by revelations involving many of the leaders of the conspiracy, whose names he had secured, along with incriminating evidence; while, had they themselves executed him, his measures had been so taken that the exposures would still have been accomplished. Although, therefore, Barrable was an outlaw among outlaws, none dare touch him; they were even forced to contribute to the cunning scoundrel's support.

"But this is not all. Barrable was known to the police. He and a small group of members of his own grade had long been in the habit of meeting unofficially in a small, out-of-the-way beer saloon, kept by two Germans known by the name of Pilsen—husband and wife. These persons had al-

ways evinced sympathy with anarchists, nihilists, and social rebels of all kinds, to whose vaporings they lent an apparently approving ear, though any violation of decency and order in the saloon itself was always rigorously suppressed by the proprietor, a man of gigantic strength and resolution. It was in a private room of this saloon that Barrable —in veiled terms, yet such as hints from other sources rendered clear—gave utterance, on a certain occasion, to statements defining his relations with Pynchepole Whiterduce. It was on the morning following these remarks that the murder was committed; and the Pilsens, putting two and two together, found no difficulty in identifying its author—especially as he resumed his visits there not long afterward and hardly troubled himself to disguise the truth. But what, it may be asked, has all this to do with the police? The answer is that the Pilsens were themselves secret police agents, and had, during upward of a dozen years, been quietly accumulating information as to outlaws of all kinds, and had of late been more particularly on the trail of the great conspiracy itself. Why, then, was not Barrable at once apprehended? Simply because

it was desired to complete the evidence connecting him, and others besides him, with the political crime; and it was feared that his premature arrest would stampede other men, some of them in high positions in the community, whom it was necessary to secure. Moreover, the testimony of the Pilsens would be requisite at the trial, and, of course, their appearance in the witness-box would have put an end to their further usefulness as informers.

"This is one side of the deadlock. On the other side, Barrable was in straits for money, his supplies from the organization being small and precarious; but he dared not apply to the young gentleman at present bearing the name of Whiterduce, and attempt to coerce him by the same means that had been successful with the other; for it was doubtful, in the first place, whether Mr. Murgatroyd Whiterduce would consent to buy his silence; and, secondly, it was highly probable that his application would suggest inquiries which might end in establishing his guilt as to the murder. . . . It may be mentioned here that Barrable's intercourse with Hemynge (a worthless character, formerly in Whiterduce's employ, but

dismissed for malfeasance) was the proximate cause of the present revelations. Hemynge ventured to approach Mr. Murgatroyd Whiterduce in the *rôle* of Barrable's cat's-paw; but the precious pair had quite misinterpreted the young gentleman's temper. The revelation of his birth acted upon young Murgatroyd as a sort of tonic; so far from crushing and intimidating him, it seemed to put new life in his veins; he not only rejected Hemynge's proposals to purchase silence, but he rejoiced to find himself relieved from a false position, which he had long felt (without being able to account to himself for the feeling) to be irksome and unsuitable; he lost no time in communicating with certain friends of his—without whose intelligent and manly co-operation, it may be observed in passing, this newspaper, and society at large, would have lacked much important help and enlightenment—and their conference, in which our editor was requested to participate, both hastened the present publication and expanded many of its details. . . . Although by the terms of the elder Whiterduce's will, Mr. Murgatroyd inherits the property by inalienable right, he desires henceforth to renounce all

pretension to the acquaintance and countenance of those who may deem themselves to have been imposed upon. . . . It is our opinion that he will find himself possessed of more friends than ever, and of the kind that is worth having! . . . Among the comedy features to which we alluded above may be recorded the circumstance that Mr. Murgatroyd has been anxiously in quest, ever since the murder, of the party or parties to whom certain large sums of money appeared by the accounts to have been paid. These payments were seemingly more or less regular and periodical; but the payees were not specified, and Mr. Murgatroyd, desirous to continue to fulfil (so far as he could determine them) the established customs of the deceased, was at a loss to understand why the former recipients of this largess did not come forward to claim it. It is needless to explain that this money represented the elder Whiterduce's supplies to the secret organization. The latter was at least as desirous to have the payments continued as Mr. Murgatroyd was to continue them, but were withheld by obvious reasons from allowing their wants to transpire. Even ready cash may some-

times he bought at altogether too high a price! . . .

"It only remains to add, therefore, that Barrable and Hemynge are both in custody, and that the latter has offered to turn State's evidence. It may be necessary to accept this proposal; for we fear that the difficulties in the way of bringing to justice the more prominent and responsible members of this conspiracy will be only too great in any event. The organization, or society, was in so large a degree inspired and—we might almost say — constituted by Pynchepole Whiterduce, that it not only collapsed at his death, but little that is tangible in the way of testimony against its other members can be looked for. Whatever of such testimony was accessible to the guilty ones they have of course destroyed; some of them have fled the country; and there will be a disposition in certain quarters to bear lightly upon others. The evil having been extirpated, and the chief malefactor beyond our reach, it will be argued that public convenience and morals will not be advanced by stirring over the dregs of this chief scandal of our generation. . . . At all events, we have done our duty!"

CHAPTER XIV

UNDERCURRENTS

Isabella Sharingbourne, after parting from Scaramanga, did not return home. She had meant to do so, for there were in her room things of hers which should have gone with her on the journey she was to make on the morrow. But she could not meet her mother. The terrible scene of the morning had opened a gulf between them never to be crossed. That scene had not been premeditated on Isabella's part. The revelation of the letter which she had accidentally found some months before had ever since burned in her heart and weighed upon it; it had brought home to her as nothing else could have done the ugly reality of human sin and pollution. Its effect had been to make a callousness in the tenderest and most sacred spot in her soul; a girl can sooner afford almost any loss than that of reverence for her mother. Combined with her distaste for

Murgatroyd and the fancy (capricious at first) which she had permitted herself for Scaramanga, it had impelled her to her present pass. In her morbid and feverish musings it had almost seemed to her a duty—perverse and diabolic, but a sort of duty still—to follow in her mother's footsteps.

But she had never contemplated telling her mother of her discovery. Often had she longed, indeed, for some tender and remorseful explanation between them—some passionate, tragic episode of confession, harrowing but wholesome to the soul. Then she could have taken her mother to her heart of hearts closer than ever before, and from those depths of humiliation and forgiveness there would have arisen, she thought, some fragrant flower of charity and hope. But the girl could not herself give the cue for such a scene; the initiative must come from her mother if it came at all. She waited in vain, and at last the miserable *dénouement* had been forced on in the manner we have seen. After this there could be no reconciliation between the two.

There was a neat, quiet apartment house in a street not far from the Park, in which persons who applied with satisfactory refer-

ences found a safe and comfortable abode. In one of the airy upper floors of this establishment a certain young lady, with whom we are slightly acquainted, was keeping house all by herself. She had three pretty, spotless rooms and a kitchen ; she had a regular income from investments, sufficient to pay her board and lodging and for her moderate but tasteful wardrobe, and she earned enough money besides to provide her with some luxuries. In short, she was an example of a class which has come into existence among us within quite recent memory, and may be regarded as, on the whole, one of our more humane and beneficent institutions. She was a bachelor girl, and her name was Sabina Estengrewe.

Sabina was a New Woman, of not too aggressive a variety. She had good sense and some talent ; she was gifted with excellent spirits, and had the prettiness of sound health and a lively temperament. She took a benevolent interest in her sex, and during some months in winter accepted invitations to lecture before the various women's clubs and other organizations that have sprung up of late years. She was a successful little creature in her own sphere and measure, and was

well disposed toward all the world. The marriage of her aunt, to whose charms the fashionable clergyman of the day had, as we know, fallen a captive, had precipitated Sabina's independence. Unlike her sister Hannah, she could not digest the idea of settling down under her step-uncle's wing, and had accordingly taken this little flight on her own account. Some people did not approve of such doings, but Sabina did, and that was enough for her happiness.

She and the beautiful, clever, and fortunate Miss Sharingbourne had recently seen a good deal of each other; there were points of sympathy between them. Sabina looked upon Isabella as the ideal girl of the period; the grave, reticent, occasionally sardonic Isabella secretly envied the jolly little female bachelor, and liked her unconditionally, and they both believed in the future (as it is technically termed) of the sex. Isabella had more brains than Sabina, but could not use them to such practical purpose. Sabina did not see what a girl betrothed to millions could do with brains any way; but later she divined that her friend's matrimonial anticipations, in spite of the millions, were not rose hued. This, of course, interested her im-

mensely, and the two young ladies ultimately became quite confidential. But there was one subject—of course, the dominant one in her thoughts—that of Scaramanga—which Isabella never once alluded to. She thought Sabina had no suspicions in that direction; but herein she did less than justice to her sprightly friend's natural sagacity. Sabina did not know how far things had gone between Isabella and the romantic musician, but she was convinced that Scaramanga was an object of no small importance in her friend's eyes. She was sure that Isabella would do nothing wrong; for the rest, the situation was exciting and delightful. It would come out right somehow, as a matter of course.

Though silent as to Scaramanga, Isabella allowed it to be understood that she had made up her mind never to marry poor Murgatroyd. Sabina did not think Murgatroyd nearly as impossible as did her friend, though she could easily agree that he was not good enough for the latter. Who was, indeed? What, then, did Isabella intend to do? Isabella replied that she would like to do as Sabina was doing; but there were obstacles; she had no income of her own, not even a

small one; she could not lecture, nor were her musical or dramatic talents certainly available as a means of livelihood, and, at all events, she could not live in the same place with the man she meant to jilt and in the society that had expected her to be the wealthiest bride in town. Since something must be done, however, she affirmed her purpose to go to some remote place and there do the best she could, with such resources as she had. Sabina spoke sagely of the rashness of such an idea, but ended by offering to do anything in her power to help her out with her plan. She could give her introductions, perhaps practical hints, and other useful things. But she avowed her conviction that Isabella could not fail to succeed in anything she might undertake. She hoped Isabella would now say something about Scaramanga, and her not doing so made her a little anxious. If Isabella was going to make a run-away marriage with him, why should she not say so? And if she was not going to make such a marriage, what was she going to do? Sabina was troubled.

About noon of the day whose beginning has been recounted Sabina was walking up and down in her little sitting-room declaim-

ing a passage in her new speech, when her door-bell rang, and there was Isabella, erect, slender, grave, with dark circles around her eyes. Sabina kissed and welcomed her with joy. Isabella hugged her with more than usual emphasis. "What has happened, dear?" Sabina immediately asked.

"Nothing. Yes, I'm going to leave—I have left. May I stay with you to-night? You might send a note home to say that I am here. To-morrow I shall go away for good."

"My dearest girl! Alone?"

"Yes!" said Isabella, and sighed.

"Is that just a sigh or is it a lie?" asked Sabina; but unfortunately she did not utter the words aloud. "And where shall you go?" was the inquiry that reached Isabella's ears.

She took one of the bachelor girl's hands, as they sat side by side, and after a few moments said: "People will ask you that after I am gone, and it will be best if you can answer that you don't know. So I won't tell you."

"Oh! but I wouldn't mind a little whopper like that," returned Sabina. "You tell and I'll forget!"

But Isabella shook her head. "I'll write to you afterward," she said.

"Well, but look here—I was just thinking of running off for a lark somewhere—I've nothing to do; mightn't I go with you, wherever it is? Think what fun we'd have! And I might put you up to some points, too. You have theories, you know, but I have experience."

Isabella gave a start and a slight shudder; Sabina wondered why. "No, dear," Isabella said, "there are reasons why it's best not. How good you are, you blessed little thing! Some day you'll know all about it. Don't talk about experience; you don't know what it means, thank God! Let us change the subject; it makes me blue. What are you doing now? By the bye, you remember, I had my trunk sent here a while ago? I'll have to look through it to see if I have all I need. I know I've left some things at home, but they'll have to stay there; I can't go for them."

Sabina leaned over and kissed Isabella's shoulder. "Bless you, my darling, wherever you go! Your trunk? yes. I've whole stacks of things—things I don't want—under things, you know—you're about a foot

too tall to wear my dresses, unfortunately—and you've got to take them. I was going to give 'em to the Women's Exchange to sell to poor folks. We'll rake 'em over presently. But the first thing is lunch! Gracious, my dear, you don't know what lunches I get up for myself now! And I got a case of that lovely Tokay, you know, yesterday. One can't get tight on it, but it makes you fat and jolly and takes away the black rings under your eyes. By Jove! I'm glad you happened in to-day—you couldn't have hit me in a better spot! Come in and take a look at my larder; you've got to learn how we bachelors live, you know. This is going to be a spree!"

Truly, what a thing is friendship! Sexual love is like the tropic sunshine, but friendship is like the broad, constant, helpful daylight, blessing all the world.

The two girls played together, Sabina's jollity gradually spreading its contagion to her friend. And the latter, knowing that her time was short, threw herself into the game with almost too much energy. Ever and anon, in the midst of the laughing and gayety, a sigh would come up from the darkling depths and break upon the smiling sur-

face; or a wave of strange heat would flow into her cheeks and eyes at the memory of Scaramanga's kiss. Then, conscious of Sabina's glance, she would laugh once more. There were moments when she could barely restrain herself from burying her head in the kind little bachelor's lap and sobbing out the whole story. But she would not! She clung to Sabina's undoubting faith in her as to the one good thing left to her, and she would do nothing to endanger it. Besides, the secret was her lover's as well as hers. Finally, perhaps, she felt that if she told she would never go to him, and that sinister thought held her more strongly than either of the others.

Toward evening Sabina, at Isabella's request, wrote and despatched a note of a few lines to Mrs. Sharingbourne, saying that she was going to make her friend dine and spend the night with her. "I'll be leaving town before long," she added, "and mayn't get another chance at her."

"I can't help feeling awfully sorry about your mother, by Jove I can't!" she observed. "Why don't you tell her? She'd kick at first, of course; but she's as good as gold at bottom, though she has such strict

notions—the old folks always have, you know. And she loves you for all she's worth, and is as proud of you as a peacock. She'd come round, when she saw you'd made up your mind. Just tell her you won't marry Murgatroyd, and stick it out. What if she did fight? Gracious! Fighting is larks, when you know you're going to win!"

"Tell her I send her my love," replied Isabella, after a pause, in a low voice, "and you mustn't ask me anything more."

Sabina lifted one shoulder, put up her eyebrows, put out her underlip, wrote, "She makes me open this again to send you her dearest love," quickly folded up and sealed the note, and went out and gave it to the boy in the passage.

They dined at half-past six, and finished the pint bottle of Tokay which they had begun at lunch. Then Sabina said:

"Now, old chap, I've got tickets to the opera; it's the last night of the season, you know, and we'll have to take it in. That little Letitia is singing like an angel. She's a love. Come on! The seats are in the family circle, second row, so there's no risk of anybody seeing us."

Isabella's mood had now undergone a re-

action, and she was carelessly compliant. So they put on their things and sallied forth, Sabina, when they reached the pavement, pulling up her little collar, shooting down her little cuffs, and sticking out her little elbow, with "Take my arm, dear!"

"I wish I could live with you always!" said Isabella, taking it, with a laugh and a sigh.

The theatre was packed with a good-natured, perspiring, last-night audience. The two girls, from their position, could not only hear well, but could see everything without being seen. The charming prima donna never was more charming or in better voice.

"Nothing like using your voice for fetching up your general condition," Sabina remarked. "Singing's the best, of course, but elocution and speaking are good enough. Look at me, how fat I'm getting. Look at my chest! Put your hand here and feel of that biceps! That's what you want—something to work your lungs. I believe you're going to be the great tragic actress. Getting started is the only trouble. But I'll give you some letters, and when you're settled I'm coming to make you a visit, you know. What's the matter, dear?"

"Nothing. Somebody I knew."

"Where? Oh, I see. I don't think he's such a bad sort, do you know? I like him. He's not handsome, exactly, but he looks like a man; a woman would feel safe with him. If I were you I'd marry him, after all."

"Marry. . . . What do you mean? What have I to do with Mr. Scaramanga?"

"Scaramanga? I'm talking of Murgatroyd, in the stage-box there, with those three fellows. Who are they? That man with eye-glasses is nice! How straight and strong he holds himself! I like a man who has respect for his chest! Look at that big, stout one beside him; he looks like what I imagine a Dutch Burgomaster. But, oh, my dear, get on to the curves of the nose of that man behind him—Don Quixote to a hair, by Jove!"

"He's a music-teacher; I met him the other day; his name is Scamell."

"Scamell—not Scaramanga? Where is he? Yes, I've got him now. Just strolled in to take a last look at his opera. Well, he's handsome, but he'll never really think much of anybody but himself. I wouldn't trust him as far as I could reach! There's

more real solid stuff in Murgy's little finger than in all that fine slim body of his. One can stand him at a dinner-table once in a season or so, but fancy living with such a creature all one's life. I'd break all the looking-glasses, and let him die of a decline!"

This was an impromptu inspiration on Sabina's part, and she did it with an art to deceive the very elect. Isabella was convinced that it was an opinion without *arrière pensée*. She made no rejoinder, and the other let it drop there. If it were to do good, it must be by quiet fermentation. Without knowing exactly when or why, Sabina had by this time made up her mind that Isabella was entangled with Scaramanga in an undesirable way. It was no use opposing her openly, but indirect methods were sometimes effective. Isabella turned very taciturn, and that seemed a not unhopeful symptom to her companion.

The opera came to an end with cheers and flowers; the curtain went down, then went up again, and Letitia sang "Auld Lang Syne," with the audience enthusiastically chorusing. A huge floral emblem was handed over the foot-lights, and laid hold of

with smiles and courtesies by the sparkling prima donna. The curtain went down once more, but once more went up, and this time there was Scaramanga with Letitia's hand in his.

"Speech! Speech!"

Scaramanga stepped forward. What a graceful, romantic figure! But he certainly did look conceited. What was he saying? The usual things! Then he added a last word:

"But I know—I feel—that I could never have been asked to stand before you to-night on my own merits. It is to this lady whose hand I hold that I owe this reception. She has put into my work the soul which alone renders it worthy. I owe her more than can ever be repaid. She more than fulfils the ideal that I had conceived. And I may be permitted to hope, in your interests as well as in my own, that she may consent to continue, in the future, the alliance which has been so precious to me in the past. I can crave no worthier or more fortunate place in your memory than that which I occupy before your eyes to-night—side by side with Letitia Valentine!"

The audience swarmed out and trooped

down the winding stairways, wedged together, chatting, laughing, commenting. "She's a daisy, ain't she?" said a man in front of Isabella. "She's right enough," replied his companion, "but that long-haired dude makes me sick to my stomach!" "He gave her a good send-off, though; she'll be his wife, I suppose?" "Wife! You ain't half on to the racket! She's his mistress—everybody knows that!" "Get out! By George! these theatre fellows get the soft snaps, don't they?" To this mendacious and unholy dialogue Sabina listened with unchristian satisfaction, indifferent to poor Letitia's reputation if only Isabella were admonished. The latter held her head severely poised, and her face betrayed no sign. After they had passed the door and were still involved in the throng on the sidewalk a voice behind Isabella's shoulder spoke almost in her ear:

"Five hundred thousand dollars! Holy poker! What for?"

"Well, he thinks his money was what she was marrying him for, and he wants she should have it."

"I'd see my girl further before I'd give her half a million for jilting me!"

"He thinks this story that's coming out to-morrow gives her a right to do it. And, having a fortune, she won't make a fool of herself with the other fellow."

"I never heard such darned foolishness!"

"Well, that's the sort of fool Murgy is. Easy, here he comes, and Gabe with him."

Isabella recognized the first voice as that of the long-nosed music-teacher; the second belonged to the man with the eyeglasses. But what were they talking about?

"Shall we take a car?" asked Sabina.

"Yes—what?—no; I'd rather walk."

CHAPTER XV

THE TIME TO HOPE IS WHEN NOTHING'S LEFT TO HOPE FOR

As Isabella passed along the streets the next morning, on her way to the railway station, her chief preoccupation was to shun a chance recognition; but she presently noticed, with a passing curiosity, that almost everyone she met was buried in a newspaper. In turning the corner of Transom Street, she all but collided with Mr. William Walwine; but he did not see her; he had no eyes but for what he was reading in the *Constitution*. She was grateful for the distraction; but it did not occur to her to buy a paper for herself.

She bought a ticket for a suburban station about five miles out of town. There were few people on the train; the tide of morning travel sets the other way. Arrived at her destination, she alighted and took a trolley-car to a point twelve miles to the southward. The trolley line crossed another railway

here. Isabella left her car and went into the pretty little station building, with its wide, sweeping eaves. Upon examining the time-table, she found that the next outward-bound train was due at ten minutes past ten. There was still an hour to wait.

All this divagation had been performed merely in order to throw pursuit off the scent. She had set off in one direction, and was now headed in another. It was Scaramanga's Machiavellian brain that had devised the ruse, and he was to join her there and accompany her on her further journey.

It is tiresome work waiting anywhere, but nowhere more so than in an out-of-town station, where there is nothing to amuse one but time-tables, a closed ticket office, and empty benches. There was, however, a man sitting in a corner by the window with a paper in his hands; it was the *Constitution*. He was reading with all his might. Isabella surveyed him minutely and idly from top to toe, idly wondered what this wonderful piece of news could be that so absorbed the world this morning, and so drifted back to her own thoughts, unwelcome though these were.

She had come thus far not from desire

but from necessity, by dint of an impulse communicated when she had regarded things in a light other than she did now. She had burned her ships and must on. She knew, now, that she did not love Scaramanga as she had imagined she did; the glamour was gone from him. Had all been well and orderly, she might, perhaps, have been content to marry him in orthodox fashion, but to throw herself thus crudely into his arms was another matter. Was he a man of temper and stamina to protect a woman and stand by her against the world? She saw him as he stood on the stage last night, his self-satisfied, deferential smiles, his artfully artless grace, his thirsty vanity, which an ocean of flattery could not satiate—was this a character to give up the world for a woman and think it well lost? Could he, who so loved baser things, make love the lord of all?

Ah, how he bowed and smirked, and tossed back his long hair, and threw noble expressions into the lift of his head and the turn of his eyes! She had admired those gestures in their private converse, but it seems he lavished them upon the public the same as upon her! Did any thought of her enter

his mind while he stood there bowing and scraping, with Letitia's hand in his? Her hand in his! And it had seemed to Isabella that Letitia had more than once tried to slip her hand away, but he would not let it go. He had not finished his speech, in which this hand-clasp was to play a part. "My ideal," he had called her! Yes, it was very likely. Had what that man said on the stairs been true? Isabella bit her lips. Perhaps so; perhaps not; but Scaramanga's behavior had been not unsuggestive of such a possibility, and on the very eve, too, of their elopement! With all his handsomeness, his poses, and his cleverness, he was not a man whom indifferent persons respected; they laughed at him; they despised him. Ah, she would little have minded that, could she have assured herself that she knew any reason why she should not despise him, too. And yet his kisses were on her lips. She had told him that . . . She sprang from her seat in bitter rage against herself and paced up and down the room. The man in the corner continued to read his paper, getting his breath now and then, delayed by the spell of the narrative.

"'There's more real stuff in Murgy's little

finger than in all that fine, slim body of his!" "I'd break all the looking-glasses and let him die of a decline!" Sabina had said those things. "At a dinner-table, yes; but all one's life!"

"I must have been insane!" muttered Isabella to herself. "Stark, staring mad! Yes; it is easy to scold now, but here I am! And he will be here directly, with those same smiles and attitudes. Did he kiss Letitia when the curtain went down last night? Did he bend over her and look into her eyes, and say, 'Look at me, darling!' Faugh! Am I jealous?"

The man finished his reading. He threw down the paper on the bench beside him, stared into vacancy for a few moments, said "Humph!" and got up to look out of the window. Then he glanced at his watch. Suddenly the ticket window opened. The down train was due in five minutes—not Isabella's train. The man went up to the window and engaged in conversation with the ticket-seller. "Great yarn!" Isabella heard one say; and they laughed. "Here she comes!" remarked the ticket-man, and he closed the window and went out on the platform, followed by the other. The train

rolled in, paused, and panted off again. Isabella was alone.

"I wish I'd gone back on it!" thought she. "No; I can't go back. I have no place in the world. I must stay here till he comes and then tell him . . . He will begin to argue, I suppose. Why should I be angry with him? It is all my fault. I was engaged, and I encouraged him. He is the same to-day that he has always been—not a bit different or worse. What has a girl to expect who has done as I have? He offered to marry me, and I said no! Well, I have seen what comes of marriage; if anything could be worse than this, it would be marriage. But is there any need of either? There's Sabina. But I can't make a living like Sabina. I can lie down on the track when the train comes in. Seven hundred dollars—that's all! Why not as well end it now as then? Or shall I go back to town and marry the richest man . . . What did they mean about half a million dollars? 'Having a fortune, she won't make a fool of herself with the other fellow!' Oh, nonsense!"

She walked over to the window in sombre meditation. She picked up a newspaper,

looked at the heading, stood reading a moment and then sat down, still reading. The spell that had entranced the rest of the world had reached her at last. She read and became insensible to everything else. She did not hear a hack drive up and stop at the door of the station ten minutes before the train was due. She did not notice the opening of the door and the entrance of a young gentleman in a straw hat and a suit of blue serge. But presently she became conscious that he was standing in front of her, and she looked up. The paper rustled sharply in her hands as she rose to her feet. It was not Scaramanga—it was Murgatroyd!

"He's all right—Scaramanga's all right!" were his first words, hastily spoken, with a smile, to forestall her anxiety. "It's been arranged differently, that's all. I came on to let you know. Miss Sabina would have come with me, but she's gone to take care of your mother—she isn't very well, your mother. I guess it's nothing very bad—but they call it a slight stroke of paralysis. I could drive you back. But if we wait for the next down train we'll get there just as soon, and it'll give me a chance to tell you —to say some things—come to a friendly

understanding, you know. I hope we shall be good friends after this. I want to be with you, I'm sure. Oh, you got a paper!"

"Paralysis!"

"Only a light touch of it. It prevents her talking a little, but there's no danger. Horace—Dr. Maydwell—I got him to see her the moment I heard; he says people live years after it. It's an inconvenience, of course, but——"

"Poor mamma! I'm glad I sent her . . . Sit down, please, I'm rather confused. Mr. Whiterduce, I—have no right to—this kindness from you. I . . . But you spoke of him—oh—then you know—oh!" She did not blush; the blood rushed to her heart and left her face deadly pale.

"Hold on, let me tell you!" He sat down by her, his face full of solicitude and earnestness. "It's come out first rate; just as you'd wish—better, if anything! Well, you've read the paper, so there'll be that much less for me to bother you with. Of course, now that we know who I am—or who I'm not, rather—it would never do to hold you to the engagement. I'm not the fellow you thought you were going to marry,

and a contract made under a false understanding's no good. I'd have let you off before, for I thought you didn't seem quite to—well, I can't put it in a nice way, but I could see you didn't like the idea much; and I had sense enough to know myself that I wasn't anywhere near up to the sort of man you ought to have. I'd have let you off, only I was afraid people might think something that wasn't so, you see; and I knew you wouldn't break the engagement yourself, because your mother wanted it to go on, on account of the advantages—I mean, in spite of my being not agreeable myself; so, altogether, there seemed to be no way out. But now this discovery about me makes it all straight. Nobody would expect you not to break the engagement now; you couldn't do anything else; and your mother—well, I've fixed it so she'll be satisfied, too. And——" He stopped, looking embarrassed; but in a moment his honest smile shone out again, and he went on:

"About Scaramanga, you know. In the first place, you don't need to think I'm doing anything generous in giving you up to him. I don't mean that there is any girl better worth having than you; I don't be-

lieve there is. All I mean is, you're not my sort; you care about society, and fine things, and I get on better with low things and commonplace people—as is natural, for I'm one of the commonest of the lot myself. So I should always be disgusting you, without being able to help it, and that would make me feel bad; and the more I cared for you the worse I'd feel. So, in giving you up to him, I'm only being kind to myself. And he's just the right sort of fellow for you—I can see that; he's clever, and good-looking, and elegant—if I was to practise a hundred years I never could get to do things and behave the way he does, let alone look like him; he's like a man in a picture or on the stage. I wish you could have heard a speech he made last night at the opera; it would have just suited you; and I could no more have done it than I could . . . However, I can see that he ought to have you, and then I can see, too, that you did just right, when you found you cared for him, in arranging to marry him; because no girl could marry one man when she was in love with another; it would make all three of them miserable, and do nobody any good. And it was mighty plucky starting off with-

out any money except what you two could make yourselves; though I do wish you hadn't thought I was such a fellow that I wasn't fit to have you tell me about it, and wouldn't want to make it comfortable for you in the only way I could. I'm not bad in the sense that I like to do mean things, and least of all to you! However, it'll be all right now. I had a talk with Scaramanga this morning, and you'll be able to start housekeeping with something . . . No, I'm not giving you anything; it's only the money that I was going to settle anyway on your mother when we married; and she can let you have enough so as to be comfortable. Of course, I couldn't take it back just because it turned out to be better all round that you should marry Scaramanga instead of me. I explained that to him, and he understands it perfectly, and thinks the same as I do about it; you have nothing to do with it anyway."

"How much money is this?"

"Well, that's for your mother to say. I guess she'll give you enough, but as she's sick I couldn't talk to her about it. You and she and Scaramanga can fix that to suit yourselves afterward. It's out of my hands,

you see. But what I was going to say is, that I'd thought I'd better come out here after you, instead of having him come; because until it's known that our engagement's off, it's better you should be seen coming back with me than with him. Besides, I wanted to have this talk with you; I may not have another chance."

"Are you going away?"

"Oh, no. I've nowhere to go in particular; but I shan't see your kind of people any more, of course, so it'll be about the same as if we lived in different places. Besides, Scaramanga said something about taking you to Europe after you were married. No, I guess most likely I'll never see you again to speak to. But I wanted you should know what I felt, so we could part friends." He was silent a moment and then added: "I have always acted like a fool with you—even more of a fool than I am with other people. I didn't know what being engaged meant, at first, nor being married either, for that matter; I didn't know what loving people meant —a man loving a woman, I mean. It all seemed to be something arranged for you by somebody else, and all you had to do was sit round and do nothing. I guess you must

have wanted to kill me sometimes, when I used to come and sit up there with you. I was nothing but a sort of overgrown child; I knew no better; I supposed that was the way to do. I'm not quite so bad as that now. I've had things happen to me that have made me know what it is to love, and to be sorry, and to hate, too! And I think I can understand now that the man who is good enough to marry you, and that you love, must be the happiest man in the world. I can understand that the same as I can that there are stars a thousand times greater and more beautiful than this earth I live on, though I can never live on them or come near them. But I believe that the right kind of people do live on them, and I like to think how happy they must be there, though I myself can have nothing to do with such things."

Isabella was sitting all this time with her hands relaxed in her lap, and not wearing that bright and joyful expression that might have been expected in one of her fortunate destiny. Her ordinarily brilliant eyes had a film over them; the corners of her proud mouth drooped; she looked not proud, but humiliated. And, after a while, she turned

partly round and rested her arms on the sill of the window and pillowed her face on them; and so she remained a long time. She was not weeping; perhaps she was not even thinking, but she was passing from one state of life to another; her nature was undergoing a change. She had learned of the existence of something of which she had not even dreamed — something strong, simple, gentle, unselfish. But it was not for her.

Murgatroyd got up and walked about the room, stepping lightly so as not to disturb her. He thought his presence distressed her, but there was no help for that. And the train that was to carry them to town would soon be here.

It came, and Isabella, with a strange sort of meekness and dependence, got up and let him lead her out of the station and help her into the car and find her a seat. "I guess I'll go forward and smoke a cigarette," said he; "I'll be back before we get in." He went, and if she wished to feel alone she had her wish.

As the train drew into the shadow of the great depot he reappeared, meeting her eyes with a certain shy, deprecating good-will. "I suppose you want to go straight home?"

said he. "You won't mind my driving there with you? It'll only be a few minutes. Sabina's there, you know. I told Scaramanga——"

"Please don't speak of him, Mr. Whiterduce," interrupted she, in an humble, beseeching tone, that astonished him. "If these are to be our last moments together I would rather think of something else. You have been kind to me; I never knew till now what kindness was. Can't I see you once more, after a day or two?"

"Why, to be sure you can, if you want to!" he replied, almost laughing with surprise. "I should think so!"

"I can't say anything now—I don't know what to say. I want to say something, though; perhaps I could in a day or two."

"All right; whenever you like. Shall I come day after to-morrow?"

"Yes, if you please. Then I shall expect you day after to-morrow. Will you come in the morning?"

"Any time you like."

"Well, in the morning, then. Forty-eight hours from now. Don't forget. But I know you won't."

They got into the hack and drove to her

house. She leaned up in the corner and nothing was said on the way. As he was about to leave her on the doorstep she put out her hand, and he took it; and the momentary glance she gave him troubled his memory long after.

CHAPTER XVI

SO RUNS THE WORLD AWAY

During this interval of eight and forty hours one event of which knowledge came to Murgatroyd gave him great perplexity and pain. It concerned Scaramanga. This young gentleman and genius had abruptly set out for Europe, and it was said that he would not return for three years. He was going to write an opera in Vienna; he had received advantageous offers from somebody, for something — such were the rumors. Surely this was very sudden, thought Murgatroyd; and what did it mean for Isabella? Was she going over to join him? Or was it possible they had quarrelled? "If she shouldn't be happy after all," thought Murgatroyd, "what should I do?"

Accordingly he went to fulfil his appointment in an anxious frame of mind. The door was opened to him by Sabina—one might almost think she had been watching out of the window. "How are you?" she

said cordially, giving him a stout handshake. "I'm glad to see you! Before you see Isabella I want to have a word with you. Come into the dining-room."

He followed her to the room designated. She took up a position on the hearth-rug, with her hands clasped behind her and her immaculate little white collar stiff under her plump chin, like a little bachelor as she was. Murgatroyd leaned against the table before her in silent apprehension.

"Now, look here, Mr. Whiterduce, I like you; I'm your friend, and I'm Isabella's too. I am going to tell you some facts. Isabella doesn't know it; if she did she'd forbid me, but nothing venture nothing have; and look here, if you find I'm getting off the track you stop me right there, do you understand? I don't want to give Isabella away; but, on the other hand, I'm resolved, by Jove, that a good thing shan't be lost because people hadn't the sense or the courage to open their mouths and say what was in 'em. You get me, don't you?"

"It's about that money," faltered Murgatroyd. "I've been thinking that I ought to have given it straight to Scaramanga and said nothing to her about it. Naturally

she'd rather have it from him than from me. It was a beastly blunder, but I never think of the right thing at the right time. Can't it be fixed up somehow? Can't you think of something?"

"Yes, I have thought of something. But before we come to that let me advise you not to make Scaramanga the topic of your conversation with Isabella. She can't stand it."

"They've had a row, then? Is that why he went to Europe? What was the trouble? Can't I explain it to 'em? I'll start right after him on the next steamer, if you say so. I'll engage to bring him back! They're both proud, of course, and—but——"

"I'll tell you what would be a grand scheme, Mr. Whiterduce—for you to keep quiet for a few minutes and listen to me. If you were to bring that creature back to Isabella she'd probably kill him. And I expect he'd rather die some other way than come. There is no misunderstanding between her and him whatever; she thinks he is about the most contemptible cad afloat, and he knows she thinks so, because she told him so. That's plain, I hope."

He looked steadily at her. "How can

that be? Three days ago they . . . Letitia was in the little dressing-room, and she told me——"

"Yes, I know; and I honor her for doing it! She helped avert a terrible mistake, that might have ended, for all we know, in another Judith and Holofernes case—not that Scaramanga is much in the Holofernes style, Heaven knows; more the Robert Macaire, I should say. I'm not a marrying woman, myself, Mr. Whiterduce, but I can put you up to two facts about them—a woman can persuade herself—and she not only can, but for some reason she's exceedingly apt to do it—that she adores a man whom she really detests, and hates one whom she really loves. Some day, when I can see a week's clear leisure ahead, I may try and explain to you why that is so; but we have no time for it this morning. But Isabella is an illustration in point; she imagined she cared for Scaramanga—she made him a sort of clothes-horse on which she hung out all the beautiful garments of heroism and idealism that her imagination had been weaving in the secret places of her heart; and she thought she hated . . . However, wait a minute; we're not come to that yet.

What are you thinking of doing with yourself? Now that your engagement is off I suppose you have some other girl in your eye? I'm not inquisitive in the least—don't make any mistake about that! But I suppose if Miss Letitia, for instance——"

"I shall never marry anybody," interposed Murgatroyd, with great seriousness. "As for Letty, she jokes about it with the fellows; she jokes about everything; but she wouldn't have me if I was to ask her, and I wouldn't ask her anyway. You see, it's this way. I'm spoilt both ways. I can't care for girls in my own class of life, and the girls in the other class wouldn't look at me. But let's not waste time about that; I want to hear about Isabella. Is she unhappy?"

"Yes, I expect she is," replied Sabina, stroking her chin. "She is a girl of very deep and strong feelings, and she needs someone to love her, and that she can love. She feels that she has made a mess of her life; she is awfully ashamed of herself; she'd give anything to recall her mistakes, but she thinks, like so many people, that the past not only can't be recalled, but that one can't remedy past errors. Of course, the whole history of the human race proves the contrary, but that's

nothing. What a girl in her state of mind wants is not the whole human race, but just one man—the right man, you understand."

"What does she mean to do?"

"Oh, well, there's no telling what broken-hearted women may do; die, perhaps, or go into a convent."

"Die? Oh! . . ."

"And yet, by a turn of the hand, she might be made the happiest woman going!"

"How?"

"By the right man, I tell you!"

There was a long pause. Murgatroyd slowly lifted his head and stared at Sabina as a man on a desert island might try to make out through the mists the outlines of a ship. It must be admitted that Sabina did her best to render those outlines distinct.

Suddenly he stood erect; his face reddened all over, and he drove his fist down heavily against the table.

"I want to see Isabella," he said, in a sort of deep shout; "I want to go to her!"

"You'll find her upstairs," said Sabina. When he had gone she fetched a long breath, wiped her temples with her handkerchief and murmured, "By George!"

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No available record of the interview between Isabella and Murgatroyd exists.

A year went by. The trial of the criminals in the great conspiracy was somewhat of a fiasco, and is not worth describing. In the first place, Patrick Barrable succeeded in committing suicide in jail. Then, the government decided not to allow Hemynge to turn State's evidence. He was not actively connected with the conspiracy; but he was convicted of embezzlement and was sentenced to a term in State's Prison. Among the audience that heard him condemned there were few who sympathized with him; perhaps only one did so—the aged woman whose withered face watched him led away with such a ghastly look. When the court adjourned she was led respectfully out by the officers, hobbling feebly on her crutches. Mrs. Dorothy Tiptoft's death was announced a month later. There were long and readable obituaries, recounting her brilliant social career, extending over more than seventy years, from her *début* to her death. The Rev. Christopher Plukerose Agabag preached her funeral sermon, and his wife shed tears as she listened to him in the front pew. At the St. Quentin Club, afterward, her innu-

merable witticisms, bright sayings, and humorous anecdotes were recalled. To few women is it allotted to live so long, so fortunate, and so happy a life.

With Hemynge's conviction the case against the conspirators imperceptibly died away. There seemed to be nobody to prosecute. It came to be thought that Blackmer Risdon was no less noteworthy as a man of imagination than as a news-getter. Society settled quietly down again to its work, its play, and its problems. There were gaps in the ranks here and there, but they were filled up and forgotten. Verinder Vyse and Stukely Poyntell renewed their jousts of wit at fashionable dinner-tables, not saying many radically new things, perhaps, but giving a fresh turn to the old, trustworthy ones. Aubert Frewin painted a fine wall decoration for the new court-house, representing a *fin-de-siècle* version of the Search for the Holy Grail. He is making a great deal of money by his excellent portraits.

Toward the end of this twelvemonth, Murgatroyd Whiterduce gave a dinner to a few of his old friends. He did not live in the old Whiterduce mansion, but in a much smaller and more modest dwelling. In fact,

Pynchepole Whiterduce's fortune turned out to be very much smaller than had been supposed. He must have expended enormous sums on his pet conspiracy, and Murgatroyd was anything but respectful to what remained. He bestowed large endowments on various public and private institutions, and built a fine college and theatre for the especial behoof of musical and dramatic students, who were instructed according to a new method, whose ablest exponent, Mr. Polydore Scamell, was made chief director. Upon the whole, Murgatroyd had few attractions to offer to fashionable society, and his house was not overrun with its representatives.

The guests upon the present occasion were Miss Sabina Estengrewe, Dr. Horace Maydwell, Director Scamell, Mr. Gabriel Negus, and, at the end of the evening, Miss Letitia Valentine, who just dropped in for fifteen minutes after the opera to sing one song and drink a cup of hot bouillon.

"How many colleges have you endowed altogether, Murgy?" asked Sabina.

"There's one I never endowed, though it's the only one where you really learn anything," he replied.

"What's that, the Reformatory?" inquired Letitia.

"The world!" replied Murgatroyd, solemnly.

"Gracious! Listen to the philosopher!" exclaimed Sabina, with a laugh. "All the world has taught me is the moral and pecuniary value of women's tongues—and that's a thing that all women know by instinct. What has it taught you?"

"Well, I found the thing I care for most in the place I cared least for, so I have come to the conclusion that the only reason we don't see good things everywhere is because we haven't good eyes. If it hadn't been for you, Sabina, I'd have missed seeing the one thing on earth I was looking for hardest."

"Why, my dear, you talk in epigrams and riddles, like a graduate of St.. Quentin!" remarked Horace.

"There's one thing the world hasn't taught Horace," put in Gabriel, sending his slow, humorous glance round the circle. "It hasn't taught him how to make hair grow!" And he bowed forward in a noiseless chuckle.

"That is a problem which no longer engrow-ses my attention," the witty doctor re-

joined. "Well, I used to be an anarchist, to some extent, but the affair in which all the anarchists I ever knew got mixed up turned out to be a despotism; so I have made up my mind to let things go as they are. But I don't know as there's much of a lesson in that. What is the secret of the universe, Gabe? You ought to know!"

"Well, folks pay me two dollars to tell 'em what's going to happen to 'em; and I do it," said the soothsayer, folding his hands over his stomach; "but the real secret of the universe, as far as I could ever learn it, is, that unless what's coming to folks happens to be what they want they don't believe it till—after—it's—come! So, as far as practical results to them go, I reckon I'm two dollars ahead of the game every trip!"

"What is your philosophy, Poly?" asked Horace; "we'll have to diagnose the whole gang, since we've begun!"

"The world has taught me that there's nothing like the method," the faithful Polydore promptly responded; "and now I'm busy teaching it back to 'em!"

"Well, your reply has one advantage—it confirms the general anticipation!" Gabriel observed. "But we haven't heard from our

good hostess yet," he added; "I guess she'll be the one to ring the bell, after all!"

"Oh, I'm only learning how to love my husband and my baby," said Isabella, looking round with a smile, which finally rested upon Murgatroyd.

Sabina kissed her. Letitia jumped up, saying: "Well, girls and boys, it's time I was in bed!" and just then Sally Wintle came in with the whiskey and seltzer.

THE END.





A FOOL OF NATURE

JULIAN HAWTHORNE